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A GREAT  
STORY



## THE LEAGUE OF VEILED MEN

BY W. MURDOCH DUNCAN



# The LEAGUE of VEILED MEN



*This League found a new use for SILK STOCKINGS. They pulled them over their heads, and so COULD SEE WITHOUT BEING SEEN. For sheer ruthless killing they were unsurpassed in the history of crime and gave SCOTLAND YARD one big headache.*

## Chapter 1. THE GAMBOE MEETING.

IT was coincidence that brought Dr. Victor Corn into Corn's Lane Station that morning, just as "Solo" Mellie reached the sergeant's desk. For some reason or person unknown had removed a Harris brand motorcar coat from that gentleman's car two days before, and Dr. Corn had made representations to the police.

He was a lean, lined-looking man, who wore the striped trousers and black coat of his calling. His features were yellow and inclined to be sinister. His eyes were black as shoe buttons and twinkled as

though he were eternally laughing inwardly at some very huge joke.

In the matter of the motorcar coat he had had satisfaction.

A ruddy-faced sergeant beamed on him.

"Good-morning, doctor. Sorry to trouble you, but regulations are regulations. One of our men picked up the coat at a pawn. The proprietor says that he never doubted the man who offered it to him. We aren't changing him with nothing because he's never given us trouble before. There's the coat. It is yours, sir, isn't it?" And then the smile went from his face as he saw the lean, hard-eyed man who approached the desk.

"Well?"

"John Mellie, convict on license. I've got to report here!" Mellie was turning his hard eyes around. "The old place hasn't changed much, has it?"

The sergeant inspected the document he had laid before him.

"They gave you two years, Solo! It should have been ten. Any man who carries a gun deserves all the law can give him!"

Mellie smiled nastily. He was not tall, but his hard features seemed to give him added height.

"Any man who has the law on his heels needs to carry a gun. Come around some

# A GRIPPING, LONG, COMPLETE STORY OF INTENSE HUMAN INTEREST, featuring INSPECTOR BILL WADE, of the C.I.D., and the inimitable SERGEANT BOTTLE

By **W. MURDOCH  
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time, Parker, and I'll show you mine."

The sergeant pushed back the papers. "Take my lip and drop it over the Kinkabank. If the Yard ever find you with a mile of a 'gat' you'll spend the next ten years at Pentecostown!"

Stage unrolled in the dark brown eyes.

"I'd aching before I'd go back there, Parker. You can tell me all that. Bottle and Mr. Parsyfoot Wade—and all the rest of them!"

Parker rapped the wood in front of him. "Smoking won't do you any good." And then his face changed. "Why don't you pack your traps and go back to the West again? It's a long way from here to Manitoba, and the Yard won't breathe with you there!"

Melkoe's cheeks whitened.

"There never was a man yet who was big enough to scare me out of what I wanted to do." He chuckled maliciously and pocketed his "beat."

"I'll see you soon, sergeant. Give my love to the boys. Tell 'em to watch their step when the nights are dark." And then he went swaggering out.

Parker watched him go without comment, but Dr. Conn was curious.

"A strange fellow that!"

The sergeant nodded.

"Yes, sir. He's had some back from Devonshire. He went down two years ago for burglary, and I was here the night they brought him in."

Dr. Conn was examining the lining of his coat.

"A tough customer," Parker went on. "He's a Canadian. He had a record in Manitoba. That's where he came from—Manitoba. And I wish he'd go back. I never did the prison. I thought Dartmouth would tame him a little, but he hasn't changed. You can see it in his eyes—badness. It's still there. He's thinner now than he was then, and older—and better!"

And then a door opened and a plain-clothes man came out.

"Good-morning, doctor!"

Inspector Vernal was ruddy and bright-eyed.

"You got your coat back—and none the worse, I think."

"In perfect order!" the doctor smiled.

"I must thank you. I didn't think that the police would trouble about a trifling thing like an overcoat."

Vernal checked.

"Then you don't know much about police work. Three-quarters of the crime we handle is composed of small, petty thefts. Really big crimes are rare, and really big criminals rarer. I could find you a hundred men who would give a man a 'beating up' for a five, but I don't know that I could put my finger on many who'd kill for five hundred!"

The doctor chuckled.

"Then if ever I was a man 'beaten up,' I'll know where to come." And then his face went serious. "But I'd almost take you up on that, inspector. There was a man in here several minutes ago—Melkoe, his name was. I wouldn't like to cross him!"

Vernal was silent.

"Was would it?" he admitted at length. "Melkoe must be one of the worst men in London. But there aren't many like him. He would later said more, only the door of the change-room opened and a red-faced young constable bustled in a wriggling little man, who was proceeding indignantly at the unceremonious manner of his entry.

"Grown't you keep your 'hands down' I've got 'in, ain't I?"

"Well, if it isn't Bert Doble!" Parker said. "What have you been up to, Bert?" "It's this young—skipper—manager of a boxer," said the indignant Mr. Doble. "He made a mistake that'll mean a coat of oil to be!"

"What's he been up to, Mitchell?"

The constable explained with a maximum of detail. There had been an epidemic of counterfeited coins on his beat. Half-crowns and florins had been turning up in such profusion that skipper had been told to notify the police as soon as a bad coin was apprehended. Doble had attempted to pass a counterfeit coin in a tobacconist's shop, and the clerk had summoned the police.

Mr. Doble was bitterly abusive.

"Me—passin' the quare? It's a frame-up, pure an' simple. Why, I got—"

"Turn out your pockets!" said the practical Parker.

"I want a lawyer, I know me rights!"

"Turn them out!" said the insistent

Parker, and Doble was reluctantly compelled to comply.

Six shillings in coppers and sixpences, a penknife and five spurious half-crowns.

Doble eyed them with horrified amazement.

"Where do you suppose them 'half-crowns' could've come from?" His voice was hoarse with surprise.

Parker picked one up and dropped it on the desk. He made a pained expression with his face.

"Stinky Joe Connor's! Joe's been turning them out in that old lark behind his wash-house. He won't turn out any more for a long while."

Doble touched the coins to see if they were real.

"So help me, I never saw the like of that before. I must 'ave got them from a chap I had a little bet on with." He shook his head in a frenzy of recollection. "Jus' wait till I get me 'ands on 'em, the dirty 'ound!"

"You'll wait six months then," said Parker.

The little man was instantly abusive.

"You ain't going to make a charge out of this, are you? So help me, but you'd frame your own mother, Parker!"

"Take him away!"

At the door Doble turned.

"You think you've been smart—'titin' me for passin' the quare. Well, you ain't so smart! There's a smarter man walkin' the streets now than any of you fy ups. I saw 'im this mornin'. 'Solo' Melkoe! Why don't you pick him up—eh?"

"What do you know about Melkoe?" Vernal said.

"Perry. Wasn't he in the next cell to him at Dartmouth? Didn't I see him back 'Spider' Kelly in the dog house. They were all afraid of 'em there. Came in the Yard, 'at' the cops. All want to chase 'em back to Manitoba. The man from Manitoba! That's what they called 'em," Doble sneered.

Vernal nodded and the informative Doble was hustled to the door. From the corridor his ready shriek reached them.

"Why don't you pick up Melkoe? Or the Silk Stocking man? Why aren't you—"

Dr. Conn had been a silent, interested spectator to it all, and now he checked.

"This Melkoe does seem to have a reputation of sorts. But what does he mean by Silk Stocking man?"

Vernal nodded him to the door.

"I wouldn't pay too much attention to the sort of talk you hear from folk like Doble. The police are the natural enemies of his kind and it's subject for any wondrous talk. Actually, we are keeping Melkoe under observation, but there's nothing that we can do to make him leave London. The man is a Britisher, and cannot be deported. The Silk Stocking man—well, you wouldn't know about them, sir. They're a gang of clever criminals who have been giving us a lot of trouble for far we've never been able to lay 'em." He chuckled ruefully. "It isn't an easy job to recognize or identify a man you've never seen, and that's the position the Yard are in. No one has ever seen these robbers' faces. They always have part of a silk stocking drawn over their heads. That hides their completely and at the same time lets them see all that's going on."

"Upon my soul!" said Doctor Conn. His ear was wailing for him, and his chin-fur had opened the door. "Thank you so much, inspector!"

He closed beside and the big bolts purred smoothly away. And then he sat

back and smiled, so that his own teeth shone white in his yellow face. Something was amissing him very much indeed. He was still amazed when they arrived at his rooms in Harley Street, and he was smiling when he went inside to where Eric Marlow was arranging victims in a yellow bowl.

She started as he came in.  
 "Good-morning, Dr. Coombe!"  
 "Good-morning, Kate!" He smiled his brilliant little smile. The girl, he thought, was growing more beautiful daily. Tall and slim, supple as little young willow; grey eyes that were pools of liquid clearness; a mouth of chestnut hair cut in a long bob.  
 He would never forget the morning when chance had brought her to his door in search of work. He in her, he had seen the realization of all his dreams.  
 And Victor Coomb was a man who dwelt in a land of dreams.

#### "SIGN FOR A GUN!"

THERE had been a burglary at No. 11, Harrow Court and my Lord Septon was waiting as patiently as a man who had lost a five thousand pound note can be expected to wait, while a lean and greasy police photographer took pictures of white ammonia on his lordship's walls.  
 "The suspect's coming up, sir," he said, and took his departure.  
 Sergeant Botle came into the big library. He was a pompous man with red whiskers and very little hair, and carried with him all the assurance that the law entails.

He was mysterious; shot quick glances around the room. And then he looked to the lordly occupant.  
 "Are you the holder?"  
 "Commanded you, sir! I am Lord Septon!"  
 Botle was not overwhelmed.

"I thought as much. It's a funny thing about me, but I can place most men at a glance. Why, only yesterday the Commissioner said to me, 'Botle, my lad, I wish I had your ability to separate the wheat from the chaff!'"  
 His lordship was in no mood to listen to reminiscence.  
 "About this infernal burglary," he began.

Botle was instantly brisk.  
 "We've got a clear already. It was the work of a highly organized gang of crooks whom the Yard have had their eye on for some time now. I've been talking to your staff, and all of them seem to have an alibi of sorts!"  
 "Of course they do!" said the rosy man. "Dummet, inspector, I saw the burglar myself. A tall man in a dark suit. But I couldn't make out his features. He had some sort of veil on that covered his head."  
 Botle nodded.

"So I understand. One of the footmen saw him run out of the main door and climb into a waiting car. These Silk Stocking men are clever. They have everything out and tried. But we'll get them, sir!"  
 "Get the thief!" said the practical port. "I'm not without influence. I'll see the Commissioner myself this very day!"

And Sergeant Botle went back to Scotland Yard with his tale of woe.  
 "Another Silk Stocking robbery. You'll have to do something about this, or there will be trouble. Why don't you put me on the case?"  
 Bill Wade covered his square jaw. Central Inspector Wade was lean and keen-featured. He was one of the new

school of policemen, and there were men at Scotland Yard who were of the opinion that he had moved forward too rapidly. Certainly, the Silk Stocking gang were going to be difficult to bag.  
 Botle took a cigarette from his chief's box.

"Peterson took some photographs, but they won't do any good. This man was too clever to leave any prints around. If you ask me, you'll have to change your method, Wade. You're a bit obvious in all you do!"  
 "Thank you!" said his superior heavily. "It's experience that counts. When you've been at the Yard as long as we you will understand that. Things that wouldn't be noticed by you stand right out with me. I take a cigarette here..."  
 "I knew you never bought 'em!" Botle was above sarcasm.  
 "...and a bloodstain there. I laid them up to mean something."

Bill Wade pushed a sheet of paper across to him.  
 "While you're taking things you can take that across to Keowah. When you come back I'll know more about it!"  
 He read Botle's report and was smoking a final cigarette before the report came back.

The robbery had been carried out with precision and care. Lord and Lady Septon had been returning from a theatre, and her lordship had gone upstairs to remove the hair. While she had been in her room the lights had gone out. Thinking that a face had blown out, she had gone out to the hall to call Mallock, the butler. When she returned to her room the tarn which she had placed on a crystal dressing tray had gone. She had immediately raised an outcry. Japan himself had run from the study to the outer hall in time to see a man dressed in a dark suit, open the front door and dash into the street. A car had been waiting, and the robber had escaped without pursuit.

Wade laid down the report. The Silk Stocking man was clever. When they struck they went after big money, gold coins, diamonds, precious stones.  
 From a cabinet he took a manila envelope and drew out the paper it contained. With a hard eye, he ran over the black list, and added one more crime to the account.

The Shafteil Steel robbery, which had netted twelve thousand pounds.  
 The Dentham Jewel robbery, where the Silk Stocking men had lifted twenty thousand pounds in most stones from the most famous of Italian Garden diamond merchants.

The armed hold-up of Decker's Bank, which netted seven thousand pounds.  
 Other items lengthened the list, and Wade replaced it in the envelope. His brow was thoughtful as he lifted the phone, dialed a number.

"I want to speak to Inspector Coombe!" And when he had established his connection: "Could you come over here, inspector? I'd like to get the benefit of your advice."

He was waiting for Coombe's arrival when Botle came back and that officer was somewhat wroth.

"I think that you might have consulted me, Wade, if you needed help," he remarked peevishly. "I've forgotten more about catching robbers than that fat ass over there."  
 "That's no way to speak about a superior officer!" Wade told him, and Botle laughed in scorn.  
 "Superior! Ha, ha! I like that. Why,

if the men upstairs knew one-third as much about Coombe as I suspect—" He halted abruptly, for there had come a knock at the door.

Coombe came in. He was a big, genial man, with blue, languorous eyes and a blond, childlike face.

Botle retired to one corner in a huffed silence.

Bill Wade came straight to the point.  
 "Another Silk Stocking job?" he said, "and I'd like you to learn the details!" He pushed the written report across to the big man, and Coombe read it through in silence. Then he chuckled.

"It's a typical Silk Stocking burglary, Wade! There isn't much that I can say about it— He covered his round, smooth cheek. "No violence, of course. But that was only because there was no necessity for violence. Silk Stocking doesn't hesitate to use force!"

Bill Wade knew that. In six of the cases at present on file, violence had been used. Two killings were chalked up to the Silk Stocking men.

"I'm glad you're on this job, Wade, and not me," Coombe said. "Silk Stocking has me baffled, as the Americans say. That was why I asked the Commissioner to take me off." And then he chuckled. "I've got one for you now. Solo McNeil is out."

Wade nodded.  
 "He got out two days ago. Yesterday he appeared at Chum's Lane Police station. We've got our eye on him."

"He threatened you?" Coombe shook his head. "McNeil was odd but mean. I wouldn't be sorry to learn how taken a line to pains that were more familiar to him. I never did like a man who carried a gun. Why carry it if you don't mean to use it? That's what I always say!" And then he got up to his list.

"Blaze me, you're there, Botle. I didn't notice you!"

"You wouldn't notice much!" agreed the sergeant. He watched the big portress go out of the room, and said boldly: "I ought to be in that man's shoes right now. If I hadn't been for the jealousy of men like that, I'd have been superintendent before this!"

"Unhappily!" said Bill Wade. It was Botle's bitter regret that the powers that be had unobtrusively avoided him in the matter of promotion, and it was a subject on which he never tired of dissenting.  
 The clock was striking twelve, and Wade looked at it resentfully.

"I ought to have been at home three hours ago. Are you coming?"  
 "You can drive me as far as Golden Green," said Botle magnanimously, and they went out together to where Bill Wade's car was parked.

Neither of them saw the man step from the shadows, but both sensed his presence.  
 Crack!

There was a flash of orange and blue. The report echoed from the stone of the courtyard.

"Duck!" raved Botle. Himself, he was stoop fear. He ran forward, and then something caught him by the ankle and he crashed down heavily on the stone of the courtyard.

Before he could scramble to his feet the attacker had gone, and only the sound of his running feet could be heard in the distance.

Botle sat up and wiped the perspiration from his brow. "That was close. If something hadn't tripped me up I'd have had him there!"  
 "If something hadn't tripped you up, you'd have had your head blown off."

marked his hair superior. "That was my head that brought you down. And I hope you stay down hard enough to knock some sense in that head of yours. How often have I told you not to rush a gun?"

The firing had brought two constables to the scene at the double and to them Wade gave a brief report. They climbed into the car, and Bettle began to chatter.

"If you ask me, there's only one man who could have done that—Solo McKee. I didn't get a good look at him, but I'm prepared to swear to it that it was McKee. Do we pull him in? He lives at 28, Northville Road, Hampstead, and I've got an idea that if we went up there just now, he wouldn't be in."

For a second Bill Wade was silent. Then:

"Sometimes you do get an idea, Bettle! But we've got something else to do first!"

"What's that?" asked the subordinate curiously.

"Sign for a gun!"

#### THE MAN FROM MANITOBA.

THERE was a visitor at 28, Northville Road that night, and Eve Marlow was standing at the window when she saw the lean figure of the man in Brown Four enter by the garden gate.

"There he is—now!" she said.

And the big-shouldered man who sat in the comfortably light-tanned leather chair jerked up to his feet and crossed the floor. Casually he parted the curtains and peered out.

The lean figure of John McKee came up the flag-stoned walk and fixed a ray into the lock. It opened and he disappeared from sight. Then there came the soft sound of him ascending the stairs.

The big man moved back into darkness. "His McKee all right. I wonder where he's been—and what he's been up to?" In the darkness of the room, the end of his cigarette showed up as a single spot of red.

The girl shook her head.

"I don't know. But you'd better go now. If anyone saw you here—well, it wouldn't look good. I have to think of my reputation!"

"Your reputation is Grade A," he told her gallantly. "But I'll get out." He came up to his feet and pulled on the hat which lay on the table at his hand.

He opened the door very quietly and very softly and then: "I'll see you soon!" he whispered.

He was gone with that, and the girl heard his softly descending footsteps. Then silence.

She passed in the electric switch and then drew up, for the door had opened very softly at her back.

"Hallo!" said a hard, cold voice.

She wheeled round and John McKee saw her started open, and the flash of colour in her cheeks. Then very steadily he put his finger to his lips for silence and walked across to the window.

There was a car drawing up outside, and over his shoulder she could see two men alighting.

"What do you want?" she gasped.

"I can't say. He had been running, but his breath was coming back to him now."

"The police are downstairs," he said softly, "and in a few minutes more they'll be up here. They'll be asking questions, most likely, about me. And you'll tell 'em, lady, that I've been here all night. That you as I have been having an A-home."

"What do you mean?" she gasped. "I can't say that. Why, it would make them think—"

"Nothing nasty!" said McKee. "I know those cops. Bettle's mind is pure." He came back from the window and the furore went out of his eyes. "You'll do that!" he started. "You'll make 'em believe you—or else I'll do a bit of talking myself! Suppose I tell them about the visitor you have at night here. The man who can't be seen in the daytime. Suppose I whisper to them that Joe Collins is in London!"

"Joe Collins! Then you know?" She was white and trembling. "How did you find out?" And then the tears came into her eyes. "You couldn't tell them that!"

"Not me!" said McKee grimly. He lit a cigarette and was blowing smoke when the ring came to the door.

Bill Wade was very polite.

"Legally, we have no right to do this," he said, "but in matters of extreme gravity, we sometimes have to take the law into our own hands. We're looking for John McKee, who occupies the first next door, and we—"

"What happened?" asked the anxious McKee. "Don't tell me your boss dropped in just to ask about my health?"

"Someone took a shot at me to-night," said Wade softly. "I just wondered if it was you, Solo!"

"Did he hit you?"

"No. He wasn't quick enough!"

"Then it wasn't me," said McKee with conviction. "When I start shooting, just you watch your step, Mr. P.-y-ee. I don't miss very often."

Bill Wade heard across very awkwardly and grapped him by the lapels. Without an effort he slid off his gun over him.

"You haven't a gun, Solo?" If you had I'd pinch you just on general principles." And then he shook the squaring man loose.

"Take a tip from me and catch the first bus for the West. We don't want your kind here. You were lucky to get off with two years last time. Next time it will be different, because it might even be your neck."



"Crumbs!" exclaimed Mr. Dobbs, regarding the coins with utter amazement. "How did they get in my pocket?" "We thought you might be able to tell us that," retorted the sergeant.

"Come in, Inspector," McKee said. "What could you want with a man like me?"

Bill Wade went into an atmosphere of blue smoke.

Bettle was instantly the bloodhound. He darted quick glances from one corner to another and then went across to where the Canadian sat. He would have taken the interview out of his superior's hands had not Wade said:

"I'll handle this, Bettle!" To McKee he said: "Where have you been to-night, Solo?"

"Setting here—smoking—talking to the pretty lady. I can tell nice stories, Inspector. Some of 'em ain't so nice, why do you want to know?"

Bill Wade turned sharply to the girl. "Is this true?" She McKee been with you all evening?" She nodded.

"Why, yes—Mr. McKee came in about eight—"

"Nice, honey," said Mr. McKee.

"Nice," she answered. "And he hasn't been out of here since then."

"I see!" said Wade.

McKee was undressed.

"I never saw the top you who didn't like to talk big," he said. "You can't frighten me, Wade. I'm not gunning for you. But I'll get you. When I do, the whole of Scotland Yard won't be able to put the finger on me!"

"I've heard that before," said Wade without emotion, "and twice I've hung the man who said it." He nodded to the girl. "Thank you, Miss Marlow. You've been very helpful." And then he went out.

The girl watched him go in silence. The car started up and whirled away. She turned to the lean man at her side.

"You did do it!" She accused hotly. "And you made the cover up for you. It might have been murder."

"It might have been!" he said harshly. "But it wasn't. It wasn't my own gun. A punk Belgian got that thing unloaded on me. But let me get my own legs—"

He walked softly.

She felt coldness touching her heart. It was hard to think that this man was a killer. He was young—but the blackness of age was with his youth. She had seen

men like that before. Very suddenly she opened the door.

"You had better go. It is after one o'clock."

He hesitated to the door. "Thank you," "Very nice to see a good turn. Thanks." He went out with that and left a trembling girl behind him.

In an adjoining flat, a dark-eyed man took the envelope from his hand. There was a scratch pad at his hand and he scanned the shorthand notes which he had been taking.

He tore off what he had written and folded it; placed it inside a strong envelope. Then he addressed it in a firm, bold handwriting.

The Silk Stocking man would be having another remark before long. Of that he was very sure. He wondered just what John McElate would have to say to the invitation.

John McElate said very, very little, for the Silk Stocking man who spoke to him did most of the talking. Over the phone his voice was sure and soft.

"If you are interested, meet me at midnight to-night. I will call you again at ten and appoint a rendezvous," and then the voice had grown curiously grave. "And if you're thinking of double-crossing me, McElate, don't do it. The Silk Stocking man don't like scoundrels," with that he had hung up, and Solo McElate had sat in silence.

#### BETWEEN THE LINES.

IT was raining when Solo McElate went out that evening. A bitter east wind whipped the sparse branches of the elms in the avenue, and cold raindrops flicked his bare cheeks. There was a man standing at the end of the road. A curiously lanky man, who had been there for several hours.

McElate passed him and took a taxi. The stout man followed. He was within six feet of the taxi when it moved away and McElate's hand eyes watched him look like a speck in the distance.

He alighted at once, looked at his watch. It was after eleven, and the phone call had said midnight. He heated his way up and along a little known road that led past the Heath and walked, as he had been instructed, to the centre of the road.

It was an ideal spot for such a meeting. He was bound to admit that himself, for the bare Heath was devoid of life or movement. The Silk Stocking gang used their brains.

Very suddenly he heard the soft, even beat of a motor-car engine. He saw it coming along towards him, the vague silhouette of a saloon of popular make. The headlights picked him out and left him blinking there in the centre of the road.

A muffled voice said, "What a night!" "There's no life where I'm going."

"Where's that?" "The Postoffice Road."

The man with the car was smiling. He leaved the window the thirdest fraction.

"You know us, McElate—and we know you. We won't beat about the bush. We can see you. What do you think?"

"What's it worth?" McElate said finally. "This year we've taken in sixty-seven thousand pounds. There are five of us in the thing. I take a third, and the other two-thirds is divided. Do you want to be sixth best?"

"What do I get?" "Get a gun? And then when the convict hesitated: "I know you have. Hand it to me. That's the first thing you

do. We don't want you shooting any Scotland Yard men. The only time you'll need it is when you're in on a job."

McElate's fingers sought the long, slinky barrel of the Lopez. For a second he hesitated.

"The man in the car chuckled. "You don't like to give it up, do you? Well, we'll find work for it. Not next tonight. To-morrow the boys are pulling a job. You'll be in on that." He rolled down the window farther and McElate stared into the silhouette of a man's head, covered over with part of a silk stocking.

"Give me the gun!" "Hesitatingly he handed it over.

There was a rattling sound of paper and the man handed him an envelope.

"Put that in your pocket. Don't read it until you get home, and when you do, hold it in front of the fire for a moment or two."

The envelope was stiff and addressed to him. He noticed that as he took it in his hand.

"That is all," Solo McElate said. "Do as the letter instructs you, and you'll be on easy street for ever, McElate. No more Dartmoor—no more coppers."

There was a savage light burning in the Silk Stocking's eyes. He nodded.

"All set. I've got your idea!" The window went up with a click and the car lunged away as suddenly as it had been standing there. He crammed the paper into his pocket and walked back through blinding rain in the direction of his flat.

Two competent men were waiting for him on the doorstep, and one of them said:

"Hello, Solo! You didn't ditch poor old Marley just for fun, did you? Two didn't want to leave him standing out there in the rain all night, and him with rheumatism, too!" He shook his head.

"The Inspector wants to see you, Solo!" "McElate's eyes burned.

"What for?" "The Inspector has ideas, Solo. You wouldn't expect us to know what they are! Run him over, Marston, and see if he has a gun."

Marston ran clumsy fingers over the lean frame.

"Not a thing. Come on, Solo, and take your little ride. If you're good we'll maybe bring you back." And he indicated the stairway meaningly.

They went downstairs, and a lime, sun-baked girl watched them go. Then she went back inside to where a man sat in silence.

"They've taken him away again. I'm afraid every time I see a policeman now." She went over to the window and watched the Squad car pull away.

Solo McElate, they brought into Bill Wade as that young man was finishing his report, and he looked up without interest.

"So you've been up to tricks again, McElate? Where did you go when you ditched Marley?"

The door opened and the big head of Inspector Coombe came into the room.

"I took a walk," McElate grinned. "Near the Heath!" and Bill Wade sharply, and the Canadian stared. "What makes you think that?"

Wade looked wearily across to the big inspector.

"You tell him, Coombe. He wouldn't believe me!"

"We always keep an eye on dangerous men, McElate," Coombe said. "We like to know where they go and what they do and

who they speak to. What did Silk Stocking say?"

If he had expected the hard-eyed man to betray himself he was terribly disappointed. McElate stared at him in cold deliberation.

"What do you mean—Silk Stocking?" "Keep back from that parcel of mooks," Coombe snapped. "The Silk Stocking gang are dangerous, and they always use the Heath. Ever hear of Charlie West? That's where we found him. Charlie had been working with the Silk Stocking gang until something went wrong. We found him with two holes in the back of his head, and he was at the Heath." He sighed reminiscently, and then heaved a big bulk out of the chair.

"Got a gun? No! You've been searched for that already. But what have you got?" His groping fingers fished their way through McElate's pockets. He laid the contents on the top of Wade's desk.

A watch, a wallet—some loose silver. And then his hand touched the envelope. He drew it out curiously.

"Letters, Solo! Who's been writing to you?" His thick fingers explored the envelope and drew out the sheet it contained.

It was a deep rose-coloured paper, and Coombe read the message it contained with a rattling clatter in his deep voice.

"Dear John,

"I am so glad to know that you are out again and I do hope that you have learned your lesson. If you want to see me again, a meeting could be arranged, but unless you have definitely made up your mind to reform I am afraid that we will never agree."

"Yours,

"MARSTON."

"Poor girl!" said Coombe sadly. "She wants you to reform, Solo. The optimism of the female species is the one thing that makes life worth living. Are you going to meet her again, Solo? And then his voice took its haunting tone. "Who gave you that?"

"Maybe you can guess!" McElate smiled sardonically.

"Maybe I can!" Coombe moved across to the fireplace and lit up the lamp. "Maybe I can," he remarked good-humouredly. "I've guessed a lot of things in my day, and I'm guessing just now that there's more in this than meets the eye."

He bent over and held the sheet of paper directly over the flame and as new characters began to appear he said:

"The pink-coloured paper gave it away. I thought Silk Stocking would have thought of a better one than that."

He placed the paper on the blotter in front of Bill Wade, and carefully returned the lamp to the fireplace. Between the lines of writing had appeared a new message, in characters of vivid blue.

Bill Wade read:

"Meet me at Camden Town one a.m. Friday and proceed to Sherburn. You will be given gun and mask. Ask no questions. Be exactly as told. Use gun only if necessary. If necessary, do not hesitate."

"Very nice!" said Inspector Coombe. "Sherburn?"

"The jeweller's!" said Bill Wade softly. "That means to-morrow night." He looked at McElate. "You don't know a thing, Solo, do you? You can't remember!"

McElate cursed him aloud, and Coombe chuckled.

"Always blame the police, Solo. Everyone else does." And then he peckered up his moon-like face.

"We'd better just Solo out of commission for a few hours, inspector. We don't want any leaks."

Bill Wade looked back at the message. It was fading already, and some of the characters were almost indistinguishable. Corbett followed his gaze.

"That's one I learned first during the war. One from the German spies. You write on non-colored paper with a solution of weak chloric. When you heat it, it comes out blue, and it fades when it cools." And then he fringed up his big shoulders. "This is the first time we've ever come within striking distance of Silk Stocking. This time to-morrow night!" He made a little gesture with his hands.

Bill Wade nodded. He rang a bell on his desk and when his clerk came, "Send in Maxson and Ryan."

When they came in he said: "Take McRae downstairs and keep him very quiet. He's not under arrest—but I don't think he'll give any trouble. Will you, Solo?"

McRae stood stockstill. "You'd better not, Solo. I know a man who gave trouble and he was very sorry for it. Somehow he slipped and broke his jaw and four ribs."

Solo McRae went out.

#### THE ROOM IN HARLEY STREET.

DR. VICTOR CONN was a creature of habit. He lived very close to Sturgis Wood's, and on the mornings it was his invariable custom to feed the twins. He was standing his head upon the water when a stranger approached him with casual interest and watched him for some moments.

A maid and her charge hovered at hand.

"Morning, sir! You'd almost think the twins knew you!" the newcomer said.

"They ought to," said the medico. He tossed the last crumbs into the water and watched the gaseous rocks sink for it. The maid moved her charge away, and the little man watched her go.

"Everything all right, sir?"  
"Everything is!" Conn put his hand into his pocket and took out a key. "This unlocks the rear door. You'll find three doors in the back. One of them leads into the office, one to the basement, and the third, which is in the corner, is the door you will pass through."

"The little man nodded.  
"I've got that. And what about burglar alarms?"

"None can attend to them. They're simple-circuit alarms and they ought to be easy to get past. The office on the last passage at 212 and again at 214. Three yourself to be there at 1.30. And take only the stuff in the large vault. No small stores, and watch more than all the rest that you could carry away." He crumpled up the paper-bag into a ball and looked for a receipt.

The little man edged away.  
From behind the door, gray, thoughtful eyes watched him go. The man who stood there pursed his full lips and then muttered:

"I wonder what Sid Smith could be doing in such company?" But his voice held the wonder that his words implied. He watched the dagger doctor out of sight and then came slowly into view.

This part of the Heath was deserted, and he was not sorry for that, for Silk

Stocking was a dangerous man to track. He made for the streets and in ten minutes stood in a telephone booth and looked up a number.

Eye McRae was standing by the wide window when the telephone rang, and she wheeled at the sound of it.

"It's you, Joe!" And there was relief in her voice. "I was so afraid. Why can't you—well—why don't you just keep indoors by day. You're too well known to go around in daylight. If he saw you—"

Collins chuckled.  
"I've got eyes in the back of my head, girlie. He couldn't see me without me seeing him! And that's all I ask."

There was a little silence.  
"Where are you, Joe?" she said.  
"On the Heath. I was watching the doctor load the wrens. You'd never think he was that kind of man."

"He isn't!" she said faintly. "Yes, sometimes when I see him looking at me—well, it's all I can do to look it out. I'm afraid of him, Joe. And of what he could do."

Collins' voice hardened.  
"He hasn't done anything, has he?"  
She heard the edge to his voice and shivered.  
"No—not like that. But I'm just afraid!"

Then: "What did you want?"  
"I want you to take another look through his desk. You've got time enough to do it. There must be something somewhere."

"All right!"  
"I won't go back to the flat—not till it gets dark again. There's a picture house at the last terminals and I'll pop in there."  
Then: "The Yard have your man from Mandrake."

"My man!" He thought her voice sounded brittle, and he chuckled. "Yes, McRae. They posted him up last night." He looked at his watch. "It'll be home by seven, Eva. It's dark enough then." He hung up and stood for a moment in contemplative silence.

Eye Marlow put down the receiver and went across to the mirror. Her cheeks

were pale, so pale that she touched them up before she moved away from it. And then she went into Dr. Conn's private room.

It was a tiny study of his surgery, and the walls were lined with books. There was a big corked desk and the drawers at this were locked. Curiously, she looked out to the street, but there was no sign of the big folk. She went back to the desk.

Joe had given her a flat file instrument, and this she had fastened to her suspenders. Now she lifted up the edge of her skirt, and worked it loose.  
She opened the top drawer without trouble, and she went through its contents feverishly. Conn was a methodical man, and the papers that the drawer contained were stacked in neat little packets.

She examined and discarded them, passed on to the next drawer. Ten minutes later the task was completed and she wiped the fine dust from her hands. Carelessly she went out through the surgery and into the reception-room.

She heard the sound of feet on the stairs, and when Conn came into the room, she was holding over the carriage of her typewriter.

"Good-morning, doctor!"  
"Good-morning, Eva!" He passed into his own room, and for some moments there was silence.

It was moments later that he called her through, and she went with ice in her heart. Had she disturbed something? Had those two, dark eyes of his noted that there had been an intruder?

He had changed into his white surgical coat and there was a glass tray on his desk. On it was a crucible and two test tubes. He fastened her over and pointed to the crucible. "Would you hold that for me, Eva, while I mix this solution?"

She lifted it up and he came very close to her. He held a test tube in one hand, and she saw that it contained some fluid that was transparent as water.

He poured the contents of the one tube into the other, and some of it splashed



Bill Wade and Sergeant Bottle caught a glimpse of a dark figure—heard the sound of running feet—then the gunman was gone.

out on her hand. She gave an involuntary start, but Conn smiled.

"It is quite harmless, my dear. Only a test!" He put down the test tube and lifted a white paper towel and took her hands in his. He dried them carefully, and then she gasped.

Her hands were streaked with vivid red! He tried to rub the discoloration from them without success.

"What is it?" she gasped.

"Magnesia fuchsin!" he said. "I'll give you something that will take it off." And he went to the cabinet and produced a bottle. "Use a little of this. It won't do you any harm."

She thanked him and went out to the bath-room and the redness vanished from her hands.

Victor Conn stood by his desk and his mouth was pursed and he frowned. The test tube he examined long and closely, for it had contained only ordinary water. He opened the top drawer of his desk and stood down at the fine layer that was like a film of dust.

Then he closed the drawer.

So she had been spying on him! His face hardened, eyes flared, and his dark eyes glared. The red-streaked red on her hands told its own story.

He had checked the contents of the drawer with magnesia fuchsin powder, and magnesia fuchsin turns red on contact with damp. He thought of the red streaks and smiled.

Why should Eve Marlow be so interested in what he was doing? He knew one answer to that, and then he shrugged his thin shoulders and went back to his desk.

There was a man coming to him this morning, and at eleven he arrived. A businesslike man, who dressed like a doctor and was looking in a new fringed overcoat. It was a long time since Bert Dobbs had had his pen points in his pocket, but he had that amount to-day.

"The doctor's expecting me," he told Eve. "Dobbs is the name." He grinned confidently. "A fine guy this doc, isn't it? Just you tell him I'm just Bert to you!"

Eve went through somewhat of a loss, and Conn chuckled.

"I know Eve, Dobbs has disconcerted you. But don't let him trouble you. I'm giving him a little work to do."

She was mystified, and the doctor sensed it.

"He has just come out of prison," he confessed. "As a matter of fact, I paid his fine or he'd have gone up again. You never looked on me as being a philanthropist, did you?"

She shook her head.

"I seldom think of you at all, Dr. Conn." Dobbs brought in, and that little man was profuse in his thanks.

"I must say so you've a good doctor. It ain't many men as would send their lawyer to speak for a poor, defenceless man 'out the bars to a spite at. An' for the two pounds, I thanks you."

"You're drunk!" Conn said, and Mr. Dobbs had the grace to blush.

"As a matter of fact, sir, I had one little drink."

Conn considered him.

"Do you remember the day I saw you first—at Carr's Lane?"

And the little man nodded. Rage came into his watery eyes.

"Am I likely to forget it. Five half dollars—they were going to send me up for that. A lousy wad of shop 'n' swan money. Five half dollars!" He made a gesture of pain. "Ow was I to know the

'buckin' 'ad wind of it? And then he remembered the indolence of his ten-lacker. "Doggin' your pardon, sir!"

"While I was in the station a man come in, McEwan, he was called—a Canadian chap!" Conn said.

Mr. Dobbs had suddenly started.

"Do you know him?"

"The little man's beady eyes looked around the room."

"I heard you say," Conn went on, "that you were in the next cell to him at Dartmoor."

"That's true, sir! An' a right tough customer 'e was. Never gave the strows a minute's rest—or anybody else for that matter!"

"Then you'd know him again if you see him?"

Dobbs' eyes widened.

"Yes. But I don't want to see 'im. I've seen enough of 'im." He shook his head with emphasis. "An' if you're thinking about interfering with Mr. Eric McEwan you can leave me out of it, ten quid or no ten quid!" His voice was suddenly determined.

The doctor said:

"He's living in Hampstead, No. 28, Houghton Road. And I want you to go along there and have a look at him. I want you to tell me if this man is the real McEwan."

"What?" Dobbs was staring.

"I've an idea that he may not be—and if he's not, I'd like to know just who he is. There's a hundred pounds in it for you," Conn said softly.

Dobbs shifted uneasily.

"You think he's a 'ringer' for Bob? That's a dangerous game."

"A hundred pounds!" said Conn softly. He took out his wallet and he counted out the notes. "There they are and all you have to do is to see him once, and then 'bobs the fees. You'll never make another hundred so easy in your life!"

Mr. Dobbs snarled and fell.

"I'll do it, but so help me, I want no part of it, if it's a game. McEwan's a bad man to monkey with!" He got up to his feet.

Conn rang the bell and when Eric appeared he said: "Show Mr. Dobbs out!"

Mr. Dobbs went out to the street to where a stout sergeant of police was waiting for him.

"What are you doing in Harley Street?" asked the suspicious Boodle. "Don't tell me you are consulting your doctor!"

Mr. Dobbs, for the moment, was almost speechless.

"I was visitin' me headmaster!" he said, truthfully for once. "There's a kind a man as any wot be master. Not a pennyin' blatherin' 'ray of a cap wot would pry his seat for a case!"

Boodle was not impressed.

"You've got money, Dobbs. Where did you get it? I never knew you to have money before unless you stole it."

Dobbs turned on him, the glint of a wounded man.

"You bastards in all alike," he said bitterly. "Give a dog a bad name and 'ave 'im." He put his hand into his pocket and drew out a yellow leather moccasin and opened it. Inside was a five-pound note.

"There you are," he said with satisfaction. "Five pounds an' it's me own."

Boodle who was under few illusions, took a note of the number, and Mr. Dobbs was peremptorily manacled.

"There ain't no faith left in the world."

he complained bitterly, "an' no 'ope nor charity either."

Boodle took the wallet into his hands with elaborate concern.

"You haven't been changing your name, have you?" and he pointed to the initials in gilt letters:

H. V. H.

Mr. Dobbs was unamused.

"It—it came to me, that there wallet. A present from my Uncle George." And then he saw the "H" and amended his statement: "It got it from 'is brother Ernest."

"You tell one he after another!" said the smiling Boodle, "and-if I want it a good mood, I'd run you 'im! Get along with you and keep your doorstep clean from now on."

He watched the indignant Mr. Dobbs out of sight, and went his own way. It was accident that had taken him close enough to Harley Street to see the little man arriving, and a chaffed incident had disconcerted him until Dobbs reappeared.

As a result he was late at the Yard, and Bill Wade was sitting with Inspector Coombe in a room that was blue with smoke, when he arrived.

"Late again!" said Bill Wade, and his remark was somewhat wistful.

"I've been keeping an eye on a known criminal," he responded truthfully, and eyed his port obediently.

Inspector Coombe was laughing all over his face.

"After drawing up arrangements for tonight, Boodle, and we want them to be absolutely foolproof. I think we'll put you in charge!"

The little sergeant smiled.

"Now you're talking. As a matter of fact, the same idea occurred to me to-day already. If you want my advice," he proceeded to give it with a wealth of detail, and then very suddenly stopped.

"I wonder if there could be anything in Dobbs' story," he said slowly. "He couldn't fool me, but he might have tried to."

"Surely not!" said Bill Wade.

The sergeant explained at some length.

"Came, that's the specialist on best dressed in Harley Street."

"I know him," said Bill Wade. It truth he knew more of Dr. Victor Conn than either of them would have suspected.

"It's funny," said Boodle again, when he had finished—and for once Inspector Coombe agreed with him.

#### WADE WONDER.

**B**ILL WADE sat for a long time after Coombe had left, and Sergeant Boodle was definitely baffled.

"You've got something on your mind, Wade. You can't fool me. If there is one thing I hate it's to be left in the dark."

"Ever hear of Joe Collins?" asked his worried superior. Boodle was instantly lax.

"Collins? I never forget a name. He was a ringer—and he did two years at Dartmoor. I helped to put him there."

"He was a bank robber," said Bill.

"One of these days your passion for detail is going to get you tight. He served five years in Peterhead Prison for robbing the Bank of Edinburgh, Dartmoor, he never saw, and he worked with the old-time king of burglars, Charlie Vine!"

Boodle was prepared to listen, for Charlie Vine had been the cleverest crookman who ever drew breath and taste of his uncanny skill and ingenuity were still told.

"Charlie Vine is dead!" he said. "And very likely Joe Collins is, too."



Wade took out a folder and stared at it. It was a printed form, and it read:

#### ALSO REWARD.

The above reward will be paid by His Majesty's Commissioner of Prisons to any person or persons giving information which will lead to the arrest and capture of Joseph Marmadoc Collins, who escaped from His Majesty's prison at Brixton.

There followed a description, and at the foot of the sheet a photograph which showed a hard-eyed man of middle age.

Bill Wade tapped the sheet.

"When was Charlie Vine killed?"

"In March, 1917," Bottle said slyly.

"It was January, 1918," Wade told him. "And Collins escaped in April of the same year. The two men were inseparable, and even after Vine had given up the old game they still kept up their friendship. Vine wrote regularly to Collins in prison, and vice versa he visited him!"

Bottle looked surprised.

"They probably talked over some job they had built up for the future," But his inspector shook his head.

"No, it wouldn't be that. Vine had been going straight for several years. He'd married and settled down, and he'd opened a haberdashery's shop in Chelsea. We kept an eye on him for a while and then we relaxed. Next time I heard of him was when he was picked up on the Heath-road."

"The Silk Stocking men did that!" said Bottle. "We even found part of a stocking in his hand. He must have been playing a double game. I never heard of the reformer-crook yet who didn't. Now, my theory is—"

He plunged into it and talked enthusiastically for many moments and Bill Wade sat in silence, his fingers toying with a scrap of pencil. Then, after some time, he looked down at the words he had written.

Bottle said slyly:

"I must say you aren't much help. What we need around here is an intelligent man, with original ideas. What's that you've been writing?" He poked up the sheet of paper and stared.

Dr. Conn-Dobbs—Harley Street—six years—Silk Stocking gang—1922.

"What does that mean?" he asked slyly. "If there's one thing I loathe it's a man who has to be mysterious, and I must say, Wade, that you're that kind of man!"

Bill Wade got to his feet.

"I'm wondering myself what it means! Eight years ago Victor Conn was a very modest practitioner in Manchester. It he had never handed a year he was lucky. Two years later he was in Harley Street, and he was living at the rate of five thousand a year. What puzzles me is how did he make the jump? Where did he get his money and his influence?"

Bottle was not impressed.

"You can't go into that. Where did you get your money? You married it! Maybe he did the same."

"Conn has never been married," Wade told him, "or if he has—not in his own name. There's a mystery there. I wonder if he ever heard of Silk Stocking?" His lips were twitching with quiet humor. "And I wonder how much he heard!"

"I've got an interview in ten minutes—and I'll see you to-night. Maybe if we're lucky we'll have the Silk Stocking men by then."

And then he went out.

Bottle sat for a long time in silence. Conn! And the Silk Stocking gang. He gathered up the scraps of paper and carried them to a cabinet.

Tomorrow he would seek out the talkative Mr. Dobbs and ask the reason for such sudden effluence. And he had an idea that Mr. Dobbs could be prevailed upon to talk.

#### SILK STOCKING SHOOTS.

EVE MARELOW'S flat in Heathville Road contained three rooms and a kitchenette. It was in darkness when she went in, but there was an odour of cooking.

"Sausages and eggs!" said a voice in the darkness. "I'm getting to be good at it. Eve, my girl, if I ever want to earn money I'll get me a job as a cook!"

"You almost starved me, Joe!" she laughed. "I'd forgotten about you."

She pulled down the shades and switched on the light and looked at the

"Dobbs!" she said. "Not a vulgar little man like a rascouche, is he?"

Joe Collins grinned.

"That's Dobbs. He must have made an easy touch somewhere. I just wonder where that somewhere was?"

"I can tell you that!" And she told him about the appearance of Mr. Dobbs at the Harley Street rooms of Dr. Conn. Joe was considerably impressed. Over sausage and egg and good brown bread he considered several possibilities, and then discarded all of them.

"Dobbs is too small a crook to invent the Silk Stocking men. There follows are the big fish in the pond, and he isn't even a minnow!"

"Joe," she said, "do you still think that Dr. Conn is one of the Silk Stocking men?"

And Joe was instantly serious.

"I know it. If he isn't the Silk Stocking gang himself, he's part of it. The blame behind it. I know Conn of old. He had



For hours the police kept watch on certain premises and nothing happened. Would the Veiled Man come?

big man who sat in the corner. He was 5'10", and partly bald, but his eyes were young, and his big frame had the promise of youthful strength.

He pointed to the microphone with the cigarette he held in his hand.

"I have been ready for you. But I do wish you'd let me smoke my pipe. Those coffee milk go for my throat."

She shook her head.

"People might get curious. I could tell them tales about cigarettes, but I couldn't explain away a pipe." He jerked his head round.

"He's still away. The law must have picked him up. I accepted around to-day and heard one or two things." Then he told her something that made her stare.

"He had a visitor to-day. A little third-rate crook who used to pinch copper from kids, fellow by the name of Dobbs. He was ranging around for an hour or so. As a matter of fact, I began to think it was me he was after, but it was McKee all right. He came up and tried the door."

a reputation in Manchester and it wasn't a good one. It's a wonder to me how he ever managed to keep his name on the medical register."

"I'm afraid of him, Joe. Sometimes I think that he suspects me. I see such a—such a queer look in his eyes. As if he knew about me."

"He does," said Joe slyly. And she froze.

"What?"

He got up to his feet and went across to the side of the wall. "Ever see this before?"

He pointed to the two thin wires that ran flush with the wainscoting.

She shook her head.

"What are they?"

"Someone's been listening in on us," Collins told her. "There's a photograph our some place—possibly under the carpet, and someone's been baring a lot of attention to everything that we've ever said."

"Joe!" Her voice was a gasp. "Then

they know—about you? When did you notice it?"

"I'm too old a fox to be caught by that game, Eric," he chuckled. "I looked for men when I came back at first. And I've been careful since I said, 'I've been crazy but when you're told, you . . . And I don't think either of us has been indolent.'"

"She stared up at the wall.

"Where do they lead to? Is there someone listening to us just now?"

He shook his head.

"I'll set your mind at ease there. He went out an hour ago and he hasn't come back. I've an idea that there are big things on foot to-night. To be on the safe side, I took a quiet at the room upstairs. His name is Vening and he's supposed to be a commercial artist, but I don't think he'd ever see an easel if he saw one." His voice changed and a new note came into it. "I saw him this morning out in the park."

"What was he doing?" the girl asked, and Joe Collins chuckled. "Believe it or not, but he was watching a kind gentleman feeding the swans!"

While she was watching up the stairs he sat down at a table and drew a long, shimmering Lager from his pocket.

"Have you any machine oil, Joe?" and when he had got it, "I seem to be here today to die up, this old friend. Haven't seen you for a long time, have I?" He pulled the shiny stool. "You've been buried, just about as long as I have."

He cleaned and oiled the gun and put it into the pocket of his overcoat, and then he sat and smoked.

He turned on the wireless, and at ten

o'clock the big man got to his feet. It was raining outside. The wind had risen and the window sash was rattling with the force of it. Handcuffs clanked down the glass. He peered out into the misty street.

"Don't expect me back early, girls. Maybe I won't be back at all."

"Where are you going, Joe?"

He chuckled and bent over her. Whispered one sentence into her ear.

"To watch the Silk Stocking men!"

She was silent and then, as he went to the door she went over and put her arms around him.

"You'll be careful, Joe. I don't think it wise. Perhaps you're wrong—and if you are right it might be better to go to the police."

"It would look well for Joe Collins, with two prison terms at his back and under sentence of five years' imprisonment, to go up to Scotland Yard and propose a respectable Harby Street surgeon," Joe Collins grinned. "No—it wouldn't work, Eric. The only way I can work in my way, and I've got to be sure, I've got to meet Silk Stocking here to face. Just like Charlie did. Only I've got to be quicker!"

He saw the tears well up in her eyes, and he patted her hand.

"Charlie was the best pal a man ever had, and you're his daughter. You'll stick with me and see this thing through."

She nodded.

"And it won't be much longer now," he said grimly. "And if the Silk Stocking men get there one jump ahead of me—you go to Scotland Yard and tell them all you can know. You've done nothing against

the law except give me shelter, and they won't trouble you about that." He stood in an attitude of listening. "Thought I heard a sound on the stairs."

He whipped the door open very suddenly and peered outwards, but the hall was deserted.

"Magnificent!" he muttered. "A new thought came to his mind. 'If you do need someone in a hurry—ask your friend next door to help you out.'"

"John Miller!"

"Your man from Manitoba?" he said.

"I've got an idea that even Silk Stocking men won't interfere much with that young man."

And then he was gone and she was left alone. It was long after ten now, but she did not think of bed. She turned on the radio and selected a book, set down by the fire.

Half a mile away, Joe Collins sat in a taxi and heard the rain patter down to his head. His hand clutched the gun that was in the pocket of his coat, and his fingers tightened round the butt of it.

A hundred yards behind a second car came cautiously on. The man who drove it was watching the red tail light of the taxi, and his eyes never left it. When the dimly lit old cab turned into Harby Street he followed on, and when it discharged its single passenger in the shadow of a wall he nodded to himself in silent satisfaction.

An hour passed. Midnight was striking when the lights in the doctor's surgery blinked out and the door of the flat opened.

Joe Collins peered through the grid. There was age in his face now—age and

## To My Readers

### JUST ANOTHER MURDER

... By Kennedy Scotland

**N**EXT week an author new to the THRILLER Library makes his bow, and I am sure you will all welcome his work with enthusiasm. It is a tough story, but you will like it and revel in it, and I guarantee that once you start you will not put the yarn down until the end. It is fast-moving, tense, spiced with ready wit; in fact, it has everything you want a rattling good story to have.

The central character, Cedric Hind, is compelled by force of circumstances to resign from the police force because he prefers to get his man dead, rather than alive. You see, so many crooks escaped their just deserts because they could afford to pay good lawyers. Cedric reckoned that a slug in the right place soon settled that argument, and he was right. But the authorities had other views.

So Cedric set up on his own as a private detective, and carved a niche for himself in the temple of fame. The result was a bullet from a passing car that nearly qualified

him for a tomb. And that Cedric knew something was humming in the home town.

Once more he was right. A young lady, name of Lane, visited him and saddled him with a pretty problem. Her father had died, leaving several millions of money behind and a complicated will. Half a dozen



ON SALE, THURSDAY, APRIL 6th.

people stood to collect fortunes out of that lot, and should all the others die the survivor got it all.

A will like that was simply asking for somebody to run amok with sudden death, and it happened. The legatese began to die, strangely and unexpectedly, until the Lane girl decided to bring Cedric into the business. Before she could reach his flat, the evil genius had wind of it and had tried to rub out Cedric. Which goes to show that Cedric was feared, if not respected, and sees high as a crime fighter.

And you'll share that opinion when you read next week's grand long complete story, "JUST ANOTHER MURDER!" by Kennedy Scotland. Don't miss this, whatever else you do.

And don't forget that in the same issue you will have another fine instalment of that powerful SHADOW yarn, "RIVER OF DEATH," by Maxwell Grant, to say nothing of the tremendous climax of that brilliant story, "Old Si and Young Jed."

*The Editor*

Letters to the Editor should be addressed to: "The Thriller" Office, The Mercury House, Fleet Street, London, E.C.4.

breasts. The door closed again, and no one came out. He sunk back into the darkness of his watching place and gazed his eyes on those windows in front of him.

It was ten minutes later that the car turned along towards him. He saw the long, black silhouette of it draw up in front of him. And then a man's voice said:

"I say there! Can you tell me—"

Collins came forward. His coat collar was drawn up to muffle his features, and his mouth hid out a shadow over his eyes.

"I'm looking for an address," the driver said, "and I wonder if you could help?"

Then, as Collins stopped forward a glowing light shone fiercely into his eyes. He gasped and drew back, his fingers clanking the butt of the Luger.

Crack! Crack!

The two shots hit the air.

Collins dropped the gun from fingers that had no longer the power of life in them. He retreated for a split second and then fell on his face.

Bill sponsored him softly.

The Silk Stocking man dropped the gun he had carried on to the road. He pushed the car into gear and turned out of the deserted street.

Quarter of a mile away he heard the shrill hiss of a police whistle, and he smiled behind his veil of silk. Then, and only then, did he remove it and drive on his way.

#### THE FIRST ONE!

**M**ORE than a mile away Inspector Bill Wade sat in an alcove with two detectives and watched the rain pour down upon a deserted street that was illuminated by the great electric standards.

The hands of his watch ticked past silently. Occasionally a car would swing down the street, and then disappear into the night.

Sheridan's was directly across the road from him. Sheridan's, where Park Lane and the world bought jewelry. It was a quiet-looking establishment, conservative in appearance, and sedate in its settings. Its windows were dark, as was usual, but the interior was illuminated as it had been since the night Diamond Paul Knott took forty thousand pounds in money from its shelves.

Inside there, Sergeant Bettle crouched with three detectives and on the floor alone, within call, Inspector Coombe was stationed with three more. Two hundred yards away an L.C.C. night watchman sat beside his color bar, and beneath him an open wardrobe was crammed with plain clothes men, one with his eyes glued to a pair of night-glasses.

An hour passed: quiet.

And Bill Wade still stood and stared into the darkness. At four o'clock he gave up the wait and went up to where Coombe sat with expectancy in the darkness.

"A lady alarm!" he said. "I think we'll call it a night, inspector." He dispatched a man for Bettle and the sergeant arrived, tense, from his long wait in the shadows.

"You think the Silk Stocking man aren't coming?" he demanded. "Perhaps I leaked out."

"The trap's sprung!" said the wily Coombe. "The bird has been frightened away. Maybe it was a mistake to arrest McKinn."

And Bill Wade agreed with him.

They took back to the Yard and Bettle took it upon himself to deliver orders.

"This is all your fault, Coombe, with your secret ink and your chloride of lime—"



The escape from the police.

"Cobalt chloride!" hissed the big inspector mildly. Bettle waved aside his words.

"Mark me, but the Silk Stocking men have made us look foolish. We've been sitting out there all night ready to grab them, and all the time—"

He kept it up until they reached the Yard, and there an agitated sergeant met them.

"Superintendent McKinn would like to see you, sir."

McKinn was a big, burly man who smoked and pipes. He was smoking one now and his room reeked like a warren. He nodded briefly, for he was a man of few words, and pushed a report across the desk to Bill Wade.

Bill took it up and read it through. His face did not change, but the lines around his mouth lightened. Then he laughed very shortly.

"At 2.10 this morning the vaults of Sherman and Mannheim, of Hatton Garden, were entered. The safe was blown open with a charge of nitro-glycerine and thirty thousand pounds in new and used diamonds were stolen. A watchman, who was on the premises was struck down by some blunt instrument. Questioned by Sergeant Stong he was only able to say that his attacker was a man of medium height, and that his face was obscured by a veil of silk. Very obviously this is the work of the Silk Stocking gang!"

Bettle drew a long breath.

Inspector Coombe smiled in admiration. "You've got to hand it to them!" he said. "Silk Stocking is no slooch. That's an American term, Bettle. I heard it at the pictures." He shook his head again. "No slooch! Mr. Solo McKinn was leading us up a lane. I'm afraid, I wouldn't mind giving him a going over myself."

Bill Wade shook his head.

"He's out. I told Morrison to let him out at midnight to-night, and to stick with him. I wanted to find where he went."

Someone came into the room as he spoke and handed the superintendent a slip of paper. McKinn took one look at it and passed it on to Coombe.

The big man scanned it.

"You wanted to find out where he went! I've an idea that I could tell you now!"

He lifted up the sheet of paper and peered at it short-sightedly.

"Remember Joe Collins?"

Bill Wade nodded.

"We were talking about him to-day. Joe and Charlie Vine were a fast pair!"

"They aren't so fast now," said the ramrod-like Coombe, "because at one fifteen, they picked Joe Collins up in Hanley Street. There were two slugs in him and he was as dead as Charlie Vine was."

#### INTERLUDE.

**I**T was later than usual that morning when Eric rose and prepared for work. Joe had not come back, for his bed was still unoccupied. That worried her little. There had been times when the postal Joe had stayed away for days on end.

She dressed and wandered on the street at her own pale features in the mirror, how this was all going to end. But she was the daughter of her father, and Charlie Vine and Joe Collins had stuck together through thick and thin. She had to steel herself to stick it for just a little longer. She had an amazing faith in the integrity of the big man who had broken out of goal when he had heard of the murder of her father, and the career of Joe Collins fully merited that faith.

She went on and locked the door, and she was on the fourth step when she saw him.

McKin came upstairs, and he was whistling softly. His thin, hard face looked white in the early morning light, and there was a look of weariness in his eyes, as in the eyes of a man who has slept but little.

He took off his suit hat and stood still on the stairs.

"Good-morning!" she said.

He didn't speak for a moment, then:

"Morning, Miss Marlow. It is Miss Marlow, isn't it?"

And bravely enough she returned.

"Of course it is—and you know it very well."

There was a glint of curious amusement in his eyes.

"One gets confused with names, you know," then: "You work for Dr. Conn, don't you? He's the 'ficker' expert in Hanley Street. One of these days I'm going to hit me along to see a doctor myself. I think I've got an affection of the heart."

"Oh!" she said.

"It's got me here. And there's only one cure for it. But what can I do? The girl won't marry me!" He smiled.

The startled look faded from her eyes and was replaced by a glint of anger.

"Oh—I see!" She took two steps forward and then turned. "You can hardly blame her, Mr. McKinn."

"You hardly can, Miss Vine!" he said. He left her standing there, and she heard him hit the key into the lock. She was on the street before it came to her that he had called her "Miss Vine"! He knew!

And queerly enough, the thought gave her no discomfort. She had known of the career of her own father and his associates too well not to understand that in certain circumstances proud spirits will rot. And if laws are broken! She shrugged her shoulders. Her own father had broken the law many times. So had Joe Collins! But neither of them had ever killed a man!

And Solo McKinn had! She was under no illusion as to his true character. He was a cold and merciless killer. She had looked his record up in the files of an evening paper, and even allowing for the

Imagination of the man who had written the report of his trial, the man who had shot his way out of Darlington Prison and who had taken a two-year sentence for robbery, arrested, was no fit person for her to consort with. And yet Joe had hinted that she might go to this hood-eyed man if she were in trouble!

And then she laughed at her own thoughts.

"You're ridiculing, Eve. In all probability this Solo person has a wife and family tucked away in some corner. And so likely as not, he has had any amount of underworld women."

And then she blushed and put it out of her mind.

Dr. Coon was in an excellent mood this morning. There was a reason for this. Thirty-five thousand pounds in diamonds lay in the depths of a safety deposit box that he had rented some time before.

He read over the accounts of the robbery in the morning papers, and chuckled at the obvious perpetuity of the police. There was one other item which occupied him no mirth at all. Victor Coon could recognize the writing on the wall when he saw it, and he knew how close he had walked to death.

Joe Collins would not have missed. He sat back and lit a cigarette and enjoyed a long smoke. Joe Collins was just too late, but Collins had found him out. He was too clever a man not to understand what that meant.

In the wake of Collins would come the Yard. Lumbering slow, cumbersome, but in the end, terrible effective. The Yard had always got their man. Sometimes it took years; but they always succeeded.

He got up and went across to a little wall safe. With deft fingers he opened it and reached inside. There was a gaily colored manila folder such as tourist companies issue. There was a strip of pink tickets and two little green ones. There were stacks of currency. English notes, French notes, dollar currency and Cape gold sovereigns. There were seven little pass books for Victor Coon had been a prudent man, and had banked in several countries.

There was a pass book for the First National Bank of Chicago; the Home Bank of Philadelphia, La Banque Provinciale de Canada. There were travelers' cheques and letters of credit!

And beside them were three passports. He could change his identity three times, by a judicious use of those. He made a perceptive calculation, and came to the conclusion that he had done on twenty thousand pounds in actual cash.

Twenty thousand in cash, and thirty-five thousand in diamonds. And they were his for the taking. For he had made up his mind that when the Yard came down on the Silk Stocking man Victor Coon would not be there.

The ringing of a bell interrupted his thoughts, and Eve came through.

"There is a lady to see you!" she said. "A Mrs. Holmes!"

Mrs. Holmes was one of his old patients, and she brought into the room the fragrance of a Russian salon, and Victor Coon contacted her with the cool, slim beauty of the girl who had scooped her into the room. It was like comparing the stardom of a tiger fly with the dim, graceful beauty of a white narcissus.

And he felt the passion rising in his heart. There had been other women before in his life, but never one who had affected him so strangely as this bright-

eyed girl. He had to have her. He knew that now.

And then he turned his attention to the woman who had come to ask his advice.

Eve was typing letters when he called to her again, and she came into the room, carrying one of them in her hand.

"Are you busy, Eve?"

"It was one of the things that the most recent account of him, that he invariably used her Christian name, and this she had never become used to.

She hesitated.

"I'm making out these statements," she said. "And I'd like to get them all out by lunch-time."

"Will you have lunch with me, then?" he asked.

"Why—?" she faltered.

"There is something I want to tell you," he said. And his heart was pounding within him; the blood surging in his very temples. "Eve, you and I—"

And then he took her very suddenly in his arms and drew her towards him.

"Dr. Coon!" she gasped. "Let me go!" She struck at him, but his arms were like steel.

Then, of a sudden, he released her so abruptly that she almost fell. She was looking at his face and she saw the awful grey cloud in it.

"Behind her a flat, tentative voice said:

"So that's the way you feel about it, Coon. For two pins I'd drill you where you stand. Yeah, right on your feet."

She wheeled round and stared into the features of Solo McKee. There was a gun in his hand and he held it as steady as a rock.

"Some guys carve out a bad name for themselves without their dirty hands!" he said bitterly. "You don't deserve to live!"

Coon had found his voice.

"Who—who are you?" The colour was ebbing back into his face. "What do you want?"

"The name is McKee. As I just came up here on general principles." And then his voice became a whip lash. "Move your spine! I'm just a killer, Coon. Dred from the neck up. Maybe you agree I ain't got brains. If you do—you're wrong. I've got enough to know a snake when I see one. I've got enough to put two and two together. I've got a brain and I've got a gun. Keep out of my way—and that goes for all your Silk Stocking men, too. Tell them to keep clear!"

He put the gun back into his pocket.

"I don't know what you mean." The doctor's face was livid. "But you can't come in here."

"I did it, didn't I?" And then the hardness went out of the younger man's voice. "You'll be all right now, Eve? Or do you want to get your coat?"

The girl stared at him. Something was troubling queerly at her heart. A queer, aching void was filling up.

"I'd get my coat!" she said.

#### SENT BY MR. MORSE.

THEY went downstairs and cut into the light of day without another word. And yet, somehow, she did not find herself ridiculous or afraid.

McKee strode along beside her, and his hand, less than was dark with thought.

After ten moments of silence she said:

"Where are you taking me?"

He looked down at her and suddenly chuckled.

"Aren't you afraid? I'm the man who

kills people and things. Why didn't you wait with Dr. Coon?"

"I wanted to come with you," she said truthfully, and she could see by his face that he was pleased by her answer.

"You weren't afraid?"

"Not at all." She felt suddenly mistress of the situation. "You're different. You wouldn't do anything—like he did, I mean. You're not that type. You've made fine things you ought not to have done—and I know you have. But you couldn't do the sort of things he could do. I know that. You're clean and wholesome."

And then she was silent. They had reached a corner now, and McKee said:

"I'm taking you some place where you'll be safe. But if you don't want to go," she looked into his eyes.

"I'll go."

And then he patting her hand.

"Good girl! Will you have lunch with me first?"

"I'd love to."

She watched him covertly as she ate the food, and before they had finished she knew how much she liked him. Very suddenly she leaned forward and said:

"What made you go like this?"

His face became grim.

"That's the kind of question you shouldn't ask," he told her, and then he fell silent.

"Was it a woman?" she demanded. She had heard of such cases.

"Give me that gun," commanded the Veiled Man.

"There is to be no shooting, yet. We shall find work for it later on. And now, here are your instructions." He handed McKee an envelope. "And lastly," he added, "remember the fate of those who double-crossed the Silk Stocking men."



He stared at her.

"A woman? Good lord, no!"

"I'm glad of that," she said. "Because, if there had been a woman, I'd have hated her!" And her voice was terribly calm.

A smile flickered on his thin lips and then he rose to his feet.

"Are you aware, young lady, that we have some plans to go?"

"I'm ready," she said. "And then a new thought comes to me. 'Could I have a sheet of paper and an envelope, please? I'd like to write a note to—to somebody who might worry if he finds me gone.'"

"To Joe Collins?"

She nodded.

"Yes, I'd forgotten you knew about Joe. And he knew you, too. That puzzled me until I figured out that perhaps he met you in prison."

"He did indeed," said the man from Manhattan, and here he spoke no more than the truth, for they had met at Penitentiary.

"He liked you," she said. "I know now that he did because he would never talk about you. Only he said that if ever I was in trouble I was to come to you."

He was curiously silent; then:

"We'd better go now."

In a stationer's shop they bought a small packet of writing paper and she scribbled a note. Once she looked up at him.

"Should I tell him where we are going?"

He shook his head.

"No. I don't think even Joe ought to know that. And the letter might fall into the hands of someone else."

He had watched to the door, and the man from stiffen, saw his dark eyes grow harder. He stroked round on her.

"Are you finished?"

She tilted the last damp sheet, dried the envelope.

"Yes." Through the photograph window she saw a large, stout man standing on the curb. His blue, unadorned eyes were watching steadily up the street, and somehow she felt the tension in the air.

McLure had turned to the girl behind the counter.

"Have you a rear entrance?"

"Yes, sir. It opens into the alleyway at the back. But why?" The question was cut off by the screaming of brakes. A long grey touring car had dashed up to the front of the shop, and the big man was galvanized to life.

She felt McLure's hand grip her by the wrist.

"This way!" he hissed, and he plunged through a liver of maple leaves in the rear door. They darted through it and out into the lane at the back, and McLure managed to turn the key in the lock.

A seven-foot wall confronted them, and then his hands were around her waist.

"Jump up!" he commanded. "Draw yourself up on top and give me a pull."

She felt herself hoisted up, and then she

sat on top and stared into a quiet, green lawn. McLure shouted.

"Give a hand here!" And the weight his voice as he jumped. There was a second of pumping strain and he was up beside her.

He leaped down and caught her as she followed him. Together they walked calmly through the gateway and into a quietly visible brick street.

Behind them, police whistles were blowing, and she could hear the siren of a speeding car. But in her heart there was only a queer, wild exultation.

"Through here!" McLure directed. He led her down a narrow lane and out into a wide street, and here she stopped to regain her breath. The lean man at her side was not one whit agitated, and she marvelled at his calmity.

"It was the police, wasn't it?"

He nodded.

"It was no less a personage than Inspector Combe. You won't know him, but he's a very big man indeed. I've got an idea that Combe wouldn't mind laying his hands on me."

"Why?"

He shook his head.

"He has his reasons!" he admitted, and he would say no more.

But at the stationer's telephone the disgruntled Combe was giving his report over the wire with an acidity which might have started the line.

"Of all the damn fool ways to break a police arrest," he said, "this one took the cake. I wish you'd seen those two. Wade. You'd think they'd taken a course as some cops with Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer. They landed up there with horns blowing, sirens screaming and brakes squeaking. McLure was a mile away before they got inside the door, and I'd damn me for a hot-headed bug they'd have smashed the Earl of Hell himself!"

He hung up bitterly and drove back to the Yard, where a sympathetic Wade heard his grouse in prison.

"There was a girl with him," said the big man. "The Marlow girl, of course. She lives next door to him at Heathcote Road." He shook his head and said with grudging admiration: "That fellow can get off his track in nothing flat. I never saw a man move so quickly in all my life."

Bill Wade nodded, but his eyes were hard. While he could admire, in a detached way, the resource of crooks getting off their tracks, he had no doubt that they should do so occasionally.

"I'll have Manhattan and Kirtle on the case!" he promised.

The big man nodded.

"If it was me caught, I'd wrap it round their necks!" he said cheerfully.

And then the door opened and Sergeant Kirtle came in.

"There's a young lady asking to see you. McLure met me in the corridor and told me about her."

"You mean you asked him?" said the trait inspector, and Kirtle looked pale.

"Well, if a sergeant of detectives can't ask a question or two that's a pretty pickle. Anyway, she's there."

"She can see someone else," said the harassed Wade. "There is a department for seeing young ladies and ladies of even greater vintage. Direct her there, Kirtle."

"The young lady is different," said the stout sergeant. "As a matter of fact, I think it's me she ought to have asked for, but perhaps she didn't know my name." He frowned as though the possibility were difficult to consider. "Anyway, it's the girl



we saw at Hampstead. The girl who asked McKee that night, was—"

"Eve Marlowe!" said Wade. "Good lord, bring her in."

Bottle led in a slim, flushed girl and she stared around the room anxiously.

"Inspector Wade?" she asked. "I was told to ask for Inspector Wade."

Bill Wade made himself known at once.

"This is Inspector Coombe, with whom I am collaborating," he said, and she instantly recognized the big man who had stood on the street.

The recognition was mutual, for Coombe's blue eyes twinkled.

"Last time I saw you, young lady, you were in a considerably big hurry."

"Yes. I was with a man—Mr. McKee, his name is," she said.

"I know his name," shrieked the affable Coombe. "It's about the one thing I know about him. And how did you get here?"

"He sent me here," she said, and she saw a frown cross his face.

"Sent you here? Well, he could hardly come himself."

"Why not?" she asked in bewilderment. His blue eyes looked into hers.

"Because there is a warrant out for his arrest on a charge of murder."

"Murder!" she gasped.

"Murder!" he responded harshly. "The murder of an escaped convict, Joseph Collins. And unless I miss my guess he'll swing for it."

"Collins—Joe Collins!" She took a step forward and the world went black about her.

"Get some water!" gasped Coombe, and he caught her as she staggered to the floor.

#### DR. COOMBE VISITS.

COOMBE carried the girl over to Wade's chair and Bottle appeared with a glass of water. She opened her eyes and saw the big man looking over her.

"There, there!" he said. "Maybe I shouldn't have told you like that. You know this Joe Collins, didn't you?"

His kindly eyes peered into hers, and she nodded, slowly. Indeed she was too shocked to attempt to avoid his question.

"What did you know about him?"

It was Wade who put the question. She looked up.

"He was my father's best friend. My father was the man who was found dead on the South last year. The man that the Silk Stocking gang murdered."

"Charlie Vane!" Coombe's big face was surprised. "I didn't know that he had a daughter. So that's why Joe looks out of prison, is it? He had a trick of passing his marks as though he were going to whistle, but he would come. He did that now."

"It's funny how things turn out, isn't it? I've always thought that Charlie Vane was one of the Silk Stocking men, and that they murdered him because he was holding out on them, or because he threatened to come."

"He wasn't!" the girl said vigorously. "My father was upright and honest. He hadn't done a dishonest thing since he married—"

Coombe was silent.

"Then he learned something," he said. "And he learned too much, for Silk Stocking men got him and when Collins heard of it he broke out to get the men who had killed his pal."

Bill Wade nodded.

"It seems like that!" He sat down beside the girl. "You're pretty upset, didn't you? Don't worry, though, it will all turn out all right. How did you get here?"

"My last, John McKee told me to come here—to you. That was all that he said." And then the hopefulness of it all seemed to well up within her. The awful horror of it.

"He didn't kill Joe. He couldn't have done it."

Bill Wade was very silent. He exchanged glances with Coombe, and the big man nodded understandingly.

"It looks pretty black," Bill said, "but I wouldn't say any more yet that he did it."

"But why? It seems so foolish. So terribly foolish. Why should he want to kill Joe?"

"It's hard to say, but he might have reasons," Wade said. "And then again he might not. McKee has the reputation of seeing first and thinking afterwards."

"I can place you now," Coombe said suddenly. "You used to work for Dr. Coon, didn't you? I saw you there once. I was a patient," he added in an explanatory tone. "You'd never take me for a sick man, would you now? But all fat men have had lewis. Yes, I remember you."

The girl nodded.

"I worked there—until this morning."

"Until this morning?" Wade asked sharply.

"Yes." And then she told him of the reason for her sudden departure.

He sat in silence until she had finished, and then nodded.

"I've heard of Coon doing these sort of things before. As a matter of fact he was in serious trouble in Manchester once, in a matter like that."

Coombe had shifted his big bulk to the window.

"Coon is a rat," he said without emotion.

"But one of these days he'll walk into a trap just like you always do."

The girl said suddenly:

"I don't know. I think that he must be going abroad."

"Abroad!"

Bill Wade stared at her.

"Yes. There's a little well safe and he always kept his money in it—and passports and things. Joe broke in one night, weeks ago, and told me about it, and then today I saw the passports on his desk and a suspicious folder."

Wade drew a long breath. To Bottle he said:

"Notify the men at the stations that he is to be apprehended if he tries to leave London. And go down yourself and keep an eye on him. We can't arrest him yet, but I've got an idea we'll have grounds for a warrant before very long."

"Trust me!" said the complacent Bottle.

"That," said Bill Wade, "is the wrong thing to say to do. I'm sending Marlowe with you."

When the sergeant had left he called his constable in to him.

"Make a cup of tea for Miss Kyo," he said.

After tea and buttered toast the girl felt better.

"What do you want me to do?" she asked, and Bill Wade was cheerfully puzzled. In his stride Coombe offered advice.

"In the meantime you'd better wait here. You can't come in any harm at Scotland Yard, and it might not be very safe for you to be walking around. You can wait in Inspector Wade's room here until evening and we'll arrange for rooms for you then."

And Bill Wade agreed.

Coombe took her round the rear building and pointed out the improvements that had been introduced in his own time, and

explained the complexity of the vast organization which controlled the finest police force in the world. He told her of the four Assistant Commissioners of Police, and of their particular duties—of the departments each man controlled, and of the organization that was implied. He showed her Bertillon rooms and fingerprint studios, and the "medus operosa" files and the laboratories for continuing scientific research.

When it was all over, he led her back, slightly elated by the complexity of it all, to where Bill Wade sat writing reports.

"What do you think of it all?"

"It seems marvelous," she said. "You'd think that it would be almost impossible for anyone to commit a crime and escape the consequences."

"Few people do!" Wade told her. "They may escape for a time—but it's only for a time. The Yard never gives up, because giving up is contrary to our principle. Take those Silk Stocking men for example. They've been breaking in for years now. Seven years to be exact. We haven't got them yet, but sooner or later we will. We've tried a lot of men on the job. Inspector Ewing and Superintendent Mayor. Mayor might have had them only he died before he could assemble his facts. Inspector Coombe followed him on, and I followed Inspector Coombe, if I had done on the job someone else would have done along and take up where I left off. That's the system, and you can't beat it."

He was interrupted by the arrival of Sergeant Bottle, and that officer was in his most dramatic mood.

"Coon has gone!" he said. "He slipped out this afternoon. Heater saw his car in Tottenham Court Road at one o'clock, and he was driving it himself. And if you want my opinion—"

"Your opinion can help!" his superior told him briefly. He rang for his clerk.

"I want an all-stations call sent out for Dr. Victor Coon of Harley Street."

When the man had gone he turned to Coombe.

"Will you take Miss Vane downstairs, inspector?"

The big man nodded.

"It'll take in a few moments. Come along, miss." He went heavily down ahead of her.

"This is my own room I'm taking you to."

His room was larger than Bill Wade's and there was a bright fire burning in the grate. He staked it up for her and gave her a magazine from a pile that was in his drawer. It was a film magazine with a "sell" from a film that was running in London on the coast.

"I saw that," he said. "Violet Leftere and Warren Wellington—the screen's lovers. For two hours they took me back to my boyhood days again."

From the tone of his voice she gathered that his boyhood days had not been devoid of spice, and the film brought a smile to her lips.

He went back to the door.

"You'll be all right here. I'll give instructions to my clerk that you've to have tea when you're ready for it."

He went upstairs to Bill Wade, and that young man was listening to the lordly Bottle.

"If you'd taken my advice, Wade, this would never have happened. I wanted you to place Coon this morning."

"And on what charge?" asked the weary Bill.

Bottle was silent.

Wade looked at his watch.

"Five o'clock. We'll have him by midnight. I've got men at every railway station and bus terminus. There are detectives at the aerodromes. Apart from that, he's driving his own car. It's a Buick and there's a description of it out. He can't get away."

"I don't think so either," Coombe said. "But if Conn is one of the Silk Stocking men he'll have other resources. Perhaps he's got a hiding-place in the city somewhere." His big face was doubtful.

The telephone was ringing on the desk. Wade reached out for it.

"Hallo!"

He listened for a second.

"Very good," he said, and hung up. "Conn's car was found in Whitechapel Gardens," he said, "but there was no sign of Conn himself. Scurvy enough a traffic constable recollects seeing this particular Buick and there was a man crouched on the luggage carrier, at the rear. The constable blew his whistle, but the driver refused to stop. He phoned in to his station, and a patrol car found the Buick half an hour later."

"A man riding on the luggage grid," Coombe said. "That would be McKee. I wonder where Conn is now?" He listened as he spoke.

Bill Wade said nothing at all, but he had an odd nervous feeling in his heart that Smith stalked London.

#### STOP PRESS.

VICTOR COOME put the four stacks of money into a little black bag, and slipped the passports into his pocket.

He stood close by the window, so that he could look up and down the busy thoroughfare, and he watched the hour glass of McKee lead the girl out of sight. There was a queer rage mounting in his heart, a new sensation of anger, and a sickness very much of passion.

She had gone with McKee, without hesitation. She, who was so necessary to him. Whose charms and face and figure were always with him. And she had walked away with a common gunman; a man who was a self-confessed killer.

He let the anger rise in his heart. There was a mirror hanging against the wall, and he went across to it and stared at his own dark reflection. Gery stroked the glossy black of his hair, and there were little steel wrinkles under his black eyes. His face was sallow and very thin, his lips compressed and hard. But other women had found him attractive, and this girl should! He had determined on that, had determined on it as long ago as the first works in which he had known her.

Merely he cursed himself for his rashness. But for that one moment when passion overrode common sense, it would have been simple. He could have hoodwinked her into accompanying him to the docks, and the rest would have been so very easy. And his own folly had complicated the case.

He lifted a morning paper and read down the shipping news: three big liner flags down the column of cargo steamers that were due to leave the Pier of London. There at once he stopped.

He lifted the phone and got his number. It was a distinctly novel that he called, and a harsh voice said:

"Yeah, this is Benny Westman. Who do you want?"

"Captain Voss!" Coome said softly. He added a little sentence and the explosion died from Benny's voice.

"Sure," he said, "he's here. I'll get him right away."

Voss was a Balkan-American, whose Dutch ancestors had been sailors for generations before him. He was a thick-set man with black blue eyes, and just now he said:

"Yeah—we're leaving with the tide."

"I'm coming with you!" said the doctor softly.

"That'll be a hundred!" said the dispatcher Voss.

"And I'm bringing a friend. She'll want a cabin to herself for a few hours. After we get out to sea—you'll marry us!"

Voss considered this from various angles and said randomly:

"You have much?"

Coome's lips twitched.

"If we get away with it you'll get five hundred in cash. You're bound for Rio?"

The American said:

"Yes. We've got a light cargo. I can get you up two cabins, but if you want them credited up, my special food laid in, you'd better pay for it yourself. You give me how much you want for fancy cuts or extras, and I'll stand to 'em now."

"Fifty pounds!" said the doctor. He



"We're going on that ship," said the doctor, "and you'll come quietly. Remember, for a sensitive girl, there are worse things than death!"

was something of a Sybarite, and he had no desire to face a long sea journey in the shabby little tramp without making certain provision for his comfort.

"I'll stand to it!" Voss told him. "I'll have a beer lying at Calcutta. What's your time after eleven. We go out with the tide, so be on board as soon as you can make it. And then his voice altered: "Who's the doctor?"

"A friend!" Coome said. "And you don't want to ask questions, Voss?"

"How much of a friend?" asked the stolid Yankee. "I don't want any more trouble than I need to have. Anything else and I'll lose my papers. Does the want to marry you?"

"She will!" said Victor Coome prophetically, and then he hung up. For a moment he considered his own dark features, then he opened a drawer and took out soap, a shaving brush and a razor.

He removed the thin line of his Guards moustache and cut off the fringe of hair which grew just his ears. With careful hands he shaved the front of his forehead, to give an appearance of business.

He had a complete change of parents

here, in his wardrobe, and he changed into a dark grey suit and a navy blue shirt. A pair of rimless spectacles made the alteration complete. He put on a gear struck out of a rickish angle and surveyed himself.

Dr. Victor Coome was dead!

The well-stocked case was at his hand, and he examined its contents before locking it. Then he sought the phone and dialled the number of a bank with which he dealt.

"I would like you to send a messenger over with the contents of my safety box," he said. "Yes, this is Dr. Coome. I have one or two policies there that I want to look over. I will give your man a receipt when he arrives."

The messenger spoke for a moment or so and hung up. A quarter of an hour later the messenger had arrived and gone, and the little parcel of metal stores lay on the desk before him.

Thirty-five thousand pounds had been given as their wholesale value, and he rather suspected he could get more than that.



"We're going on that ship," said the doctor, "and you'll come quietly. Remember, for a sensitive girl, there are worse things than death!"

Automatically he wondered what would be the reaction of the Silk Stocking men to his treachery. The Silk Stocking men would have more than personal animus to occupy their attention before very long. Scotland Yard was very, very near to them.

He divided the stores into two portions and secreted them about his person, and then he went out. There was a garage a few moments' walk from his rooms, and the car was waiting for him as he reached the pavement.

The uniformed attendant looked at him without recognition, and he smiled and said:

"Dr. Coome will be out in a moment. He says you may go, and he gave you this half-crown."

The man touched his cap and left, and Coome slipped into his seat. He drove down towards the river and followed his course past docks and warehouses and drab tenements to Wapping, and at Angel Street pulled up before Benny Westman's lodging-house.

Voss was waiting for him in an ugly

liffe room, from the walls of which the paper was peeling in long strips.

"Everything's ready," said the tailor—"except that I want a hundred on account. I'll get the rest when I get the money, and if there's anything you need you better mention it now. We won't be putting in as a port until we get in here."

"That will suit me," Conn told him.

"The girl bringing a case?"

"The doctor check his head."

"No. She won't be bringing a case. I'll give her a hug, and she'll come quietly, but I don't want anyone to see her until you get well out to sea. Have you got anybody on board who might ask questions?"

"Yes, considered him.

"Yeah—there's one kid. But we'll leave him. Give Benny a five when you go out and he'll feed him a Mickey Finn. We'll be at sea before he comes out of it—and it won't cause any trouble." He walked jerkily to the door.

"I'll have to be getting back to the Laskopi, but if the girl isn't bringing anything you'll have to get her some clothes. You'd better leave money with Benny. He'll send one of the girls out to pick up some things. And I'll see you to-night, Colver's Wharf any time after eleven."

Conn went through to where Benny sat in his little room and put five hundred notes on the top of the table. He explained the nature of his mission, and Benny was more than helpful.

"I'll send Ella. She's got a good figure and good face—an' she's average size. It fits you like her at all the things'll do."

Conn left him with that, and went outside. He had one other errand to perform, and that took him to a little photographer's off Tottenham Court Road. Here he was interviewed by a bald-headed old man, who listened to his requirements.

"You want a portrait-size picture of this girl," he said, and he took the snapshot that Conn gave him. "It isn't very close, but I'll touch it up. I'll have it for you in an hour."

"Passport size?"

The old man nodded.

"I'll cut you a card to rush it like that—but if it's worth it to you it's worth it to me."

He came out and climbed into the Rolls again, drove back to the direction that he had come. Once he heard a police siren scream out, and in his rear view mirror saw a vision of a constable staring after him.

He drove the car a short distance farther. Were the police on his trail already? Scotland Yard didn't work so slowly after all!

In Shaftsbury Avenue he left the car and walked east. He had a meal in a little restaurant near Whitehall, for by this time he was hungry.

In a corner seat a hard-eyed man sat and scanned a newspaper. A man who wore a wing collar and a black coat, whose hands were still sore from clashing the cold steel of the luggage-carrier of the Rolls.

The doctor sat and smoked a last cigarette. He had eight hours in which to find the girl. Eight hours was not a long time, and London was the greatest city in the world.

If he had not found her by midnight he would have to leave her. You would not hold up the Laskopi by as much as one half-hour.

He had to find her by then! He felt the blood pounding in his head—gushing his brain. His whole heart was on fire. He

wanted her as much as he wanted freedom! And she was lost to him!

Someone had left a newspaper on the chair beside him, and he lifted it up and turned it over him. Then he froze. Three lines in the Star Free column caught his eye:

Wanted by the police for questioning in connection with the death of Joseph Collins, the escaped convict, whose body was found posterior in Harley Street. Eve Marlow had given herself up, and is at present at Scotland Yard.

He felt his breath leave him.

Eve Marlow? At Scotland Yard! He looked at the time stamp on the paper. It was a first edition and had come off the press at two o'clock.

It was close on five now!

He had been at Scotland Yard for three hours by this time. He got to his feet and went out and exultation was in his heart.

#### A LETTER OF THANKS.

A CONSTABLE brought her tea at five o'clock, and she read the asserted newspaper and magazines which littered Coombe's dresser until she had reviewed the news. And that she read and stared out of the window and over the Southampton to the other side of the Thames. It was raining now, and grey drops splattered on the thick glass like beads of lead. A cold wind whirled and ruffled the grey waters of the river.

She shivered as she stood in the warmth. Somewhere out there, John Marlow, was in hiding. She could see his lean, yellow face, and his brown eyes. She could feel the pressure of his fingers on her wrist.

Darkness was settling down and the lights of London twinkled around her. Red and green and white and blue. Friendly and cozy warm. And he could not share in it. She wondered where his hiding-place was. And from thinking of him her mind went on to thinking of Joe Collins.

Tears welled into her eyes. Joe was dead! Even yet she could scarcely credit the terrible fact. And Solo Marlow was wanted for his murder!

"Your man from Manitoba!" She remembered the chatter in the big man's voice.

And then she came down to earth. The telephone on the desk was ringing. She stared at it for a moment and went to the desk. There was no sign of the uniformed constable. She said "Hello!"

"Inspector Coombe?" came a man's voice.

She said:

"The inspector has gone out. I think he is with Inspector Wade!" And she heard him pass on the information to someone else.

"Who is speaking?" he asked.

"Tom Man Marlow," she told him, and felt that he would be none the wiser.

She went back to the window and stood there for a moment, and then the door opened. There was a thin-faced man standing in the doorway and he beckoned to her.

"Breaking news, I'm Sergeant Colver. You've to get your things on and come with me."

"At once!" she said in dismay.

"Yes, miss. The inspector has arranged rooms for you. If you'll meet me at the entrance in five minutes' time, miss, I'll have a car." He indicated a wash-room

in the corridor. "Maybe you'd like to tidy yourself up first."

"I would rather!" she said.

"I'll wait you downstairs then." And the door closed and she was left to prepare herself in privacy.

She went into the tiny bath-room and washed her face and hands, powdered and added a touch of make-up. And then she added a little hair curl. Of an impulse, she lifted a peep and peevishly across Coombe's window pane.

Thank you so much for your kindness. Eve Voss.

And then she went downstairs.

Coker was waiting for her at the entrance-way and they went out together. A taxi pulled up just as they went into Whitehall and he flagged it to a stop.

He sat in his own corner, a lean, silent man with glasses and a shabby grey suit, and after the greeting of Coombe and the kindness of Bill Wade, she wondered if Scotland Yard detectives acquired their cordiality as they achieved promotion.

In a little side street off Tottenham Court Road, he called the driver to a halt and they climbed out.

There was a car parked here, and he had the keys for it in his hand. He unlocked the door next the wheel and said:

"Get in, miss. I'll keep the other door locked."

She crunched past the wheel and got busy and he came in beside her. He had opened a pocket in the door of the car and she saw him fumbling with something that glittered.

Then he turned on the motor and stopped on the starter.

"See if we drive," he told her, and she turned round to her left.

Something struck her right ear, high on her head and she gave a sudden moan of pain. Then her senses went from her. She did not look on the seat simply.

Victor Conn looked down at her with silent anticipation, then he wiped the beads of the hyperbolic arrise clear and replaced it in the pocket of the car.

He pulled out of the side street and made for the river. Seven o'clock!

Four hours more, and until that time the girl could be at Benny's. And after that there was the Laskopi and freedom! His thoughts were chaotic as he drove into the night.

The net that Scotland Yard had thrown out for Victor Conn was tightening about him, and Inspector Bill Wade sat in his room and read the reports as they came in.

A constable had seen the Rolls at noon near Wapping. A policeman had seen it again at Camden Town. Conn had been driving in the first instance, and in the second the sergeant was just as sure that the man had hit been the doctor, whom he knew by sight.

"Probably disguised!" Coombe suggested, and was closer to the truth than he knew.

The car had been found deserted in Shaftsbury Avenue. Someone had seen a man answering Coombe's description go into a photographer's at no great distance from Whitehall.

The photographer had been questioned and could supply them with little information. The man had worked an enlargement out from a snapshot, and the background had to be blacked out. The picture of a girl, was to be passport size. He had called round an hour later and had taken the original and the copy with him.



Understanding came into Wade's eyes. "Good lord—it must be Eve! He must have intended taking her with him. If we hadn't interrupted her he'd have— He stopped and rang for his drink.

"Bring the young lady who is in Inspector Coombe's room down here."

"Very good, sir." He was gone for several moments and returned alone.

"She's gone, sir, left more than half an hour ago."

"What's that?" Coombe whirled like lightning.

Wade went outside and down the corridor and the big inspector was left on his heels.

The room was empty. Coombe went across to the desk. There was a sheet of paper and a scribbled message, and this he read:

"Thank you so much for your kindness. "The Vase."

"It was Conn!" Wade said softly. "He must have come up here—and she went with him. Perhaps he told her some story—"

"Conn is making a break for it. He has passports, money. Last night the Silk Stocking men sliced enough diamonds to keep him in comfort for the rest of his life. And now he's got the girl. How can he get her out of England?" said Coombe.

"By boat!" said Bill Wade.

"By air!" Coombe's face was grim.

"There isn't a skipper in England who would touch a job like that, with the whole of Scotland Yard on top of him."

Inspector Coombe rose to his feet.

"I'm going out, and before I go I'm signing for a gun."

He went quickly from the room and Bill heard his heavy feet running downstairs.

#### SILK STOCKING ARRESTS.

It seemed hours before the stairs cleared away from her heels and consciousness returned. She was lying in a bed-bed in a room that was entirely dark. Then, as the haze cleared away, she saw the walls in a dim greyness. She sat up and groped along the wall, and her fingers touched an electric switch.

The room was small and dirty. The ceiling was low, and the blankets smelled evilly. There was no fireplace, and the window was covered with wooden slats. She stared around her, and then it all came back to her. The man in the car who had called himself Colver—Conn!

It could be no one else. How well he had disguised himself. Familiar as she was with him, she had failed to recognize him in either speech or manner.

And where was she? Why had he brought her here? She went shakily to the door and tried it. It was locked. Cautiously she crossed over to the window.

The river was close at hand. She could hear the soft lapping of the water from where she stood. The window had an old-fashioned centre sash, and her fingers had reached it when she heard a key grate in the lock.

The door swung open and a stocky, thick-set man stared at her.

"We're going downstairs, and I want to give you a bit of advice. If he asks you to go quietly—go quietly! If you don't, he's as likely to let you over the head as not."

They went down to a dark, tiny room, where Conn stood before a mirror. He had not altered his appearance, and she recognized him at once.

"Where are you taking me?" she demanded.

He was lighting a cigarette and he did not speak until it was drawn.

"You're going with me—and you're going quietly. If I have to, I'll give you another jag. I'd rather not, because the after-effects are unpleasant. If you'll promise to come quietly—you can come without it."

She hesitated; then:

"All right, I'll promise."  
"Good girl!" he said. He pulled her hand. "You're being just as sensible as I know you would." He nodded to the man. "Bring in the coat."

Being brought her a heavy tweed coat and helped her into it. After that he produced a black oilskin and she struggled into this.

Conn had likewise attired himself, and now he took her arm.

"Walk quietly," he said. "If you make one wrong, I'll give you a topot." And he held up the springs for her to see.

They went out a little narrow door and into blackness. Stairs passed down around them, and dimmed with unobtrusive heat on the corrugated-iron roofs of sheds and wharves.

Far out she could see the riding lights of ships at anchor, and in the distance the glow from the shore, that was Billingsgate Market. On one of the cargo boats a searchlight was shining from the bridge into the hold, and she caught the beam of a daisy engine and the rattle of chains.

"Why are we here?" she asked suddenly. Conn did not answer her for the moment. Then:

"There she is. The Larkins—and bound for Rio. You'll like her, Eve—or you'll learn to like her. Her skipper is a particular friend of mine."

"Are you going aboard her?"  
And then the daisy sold of dread settled down on her heart.

"We are. She sails just after midnight." His fingers tightened on her wrist. "We're going to Rio, Eve—and before we get there you'll be Mrs. Victor Conn."

"I see!" she gasped. "I hate you! I hate you. I'd be before I'd marry you!"

"There are worse things than death to a sensitive girl," he told her bluntly.

They had reached a little gateway and he led her through it and along a narrow plank. Then she saw him tense. Terror in the water, was the black shape of a small boat, and the dim outline of a bulky man at the wheel.

A cigarette glowed redly against the black of the river and Conn smiled:

"Put that out. Do you want the River Police nosing in here?" He led the girl across a slippery quay.

The red end of the cigarette described an arc and litened back into extinction. "Get in!" said Conn. "And get up in the front of the boat."

She scrambled in, and went into the bows.

Conn said:

"We'll cut away now."  
And then the sailor chuckled.

"You almost got away with it, Conn!" The girl could have screamed with relief, for the voice was the voice of Inspector Coombe and in his hand he held a gun that glared in the wan light of the river.

Conn had frozen.  
The big man said:

"What have you got in the case, Conn? Money and beads—and diamonds, too, I'd like to see. The diamonds you took from Sherman and Mandelstam's safe. Thirty-five thousand pounds, Conn."

Conn gave a little gasping cough.

"Look—I wasn't going to— You can take the money and the diamonds! Everything, but—"

"You were going to doublecross the Silk Stocking men," said Coombe sternly. "You couldn't even play a crossed game straight. You thought you saw the Silk Stocking gang broken up, and you were getting out before the end! What a dog!"

Crack! Crack! Crack!

He pressed the trigger of his automatic three times and the man in front of him twitched and jerked as the hot lead tore into his body.

Victor Conn slid to the ground and he was dead before he reached it.

Eve had screamed aloud. She was standing up in the bows.

"Oh—how horrible! You didn't need to do that. You ought—"

"What a pity!" said Mr. Coombe coldly. He brought the gun up again, and fired with his arm in mid air.

Something round tore into his ribs.

"Drop that gun!" started a voice in his ear. "An' look!" It hit the wall of the boat and John Moffat stopped out of the engine hatch, where he had lain for close on two hours.

"I want you, Silk Stocking," he said, "for the murder of Charles Vine, for the murder of Joseph Collins—and for the murder of Victor Conn!"

And Inspector Coombe felt the chill of steel around his own thick wrists.

#### THE TACT OF SERGEANT BOTTLE.

"I" was my theory from the beginning," said Inspector Wade. "that the Silk Stocking men had an intimate knowledge of the workings and routine of Scotland Yard, and that was also the theory of Superintendent Mayne. But for his death, the superintendent would possibly have discovered the identity of the Silk Stocking men, for I am sure that Coombe had aroused his suspicions.

"At first I did not know just where the leakage was, but we had already worked down Victor Conn as having some connection with this mysterious gang. The next difficult thing to do was to find out the Scotland Yard connection.

"For this purpose, Captain John Dallas, of the Special Division of the Foreign Office was assigned to my department. The death at Dartmouth of Solo Moffat, the Canadian gambler, under sentence for robbery, armed, helped us considerably. Captain Dallas, who is singularly like Moffat, spent two months at Dartmouth and came out on McRae's ticket.

"He succeeded in impressing Conn as, first, for the Silk Stocking men could use a man with Moffat's reputation.

"Coombe met Dallas on the Heath and apparently was satisfied to admit him to the Silk Stocking gang. But the inspector was cleverer than we were, and it is my opinion that he possibly sensed a trap. He was a singularly subtle man, and he never seems to have been too sure of Moffat. But by a clever ruse he succeeded in drawing our attention to Sherman's premises, while the Silk Stocking men were looking Sherman and Mandelstam's.

"It was after this that both Dallas and I were certain of our man. So far, he had been very clever. He had killed Charles Vine, who had known him for many years, because Vine had suspected him, and had tried to prove those suspicions. He was yet to kill Joseph Collins, who was following the same line of inquiry as Vine had done.

"However, we had no proof that we were correct, or in what exact Coombe was implicated. The only thing that we could do was to give him scope and hope that he would implicate himself." He smiled slightly. "Coombe loved his fame. Victor Cunn was a clever man, but he lacked the selfishness of Coombe. When he saw how things were shaping he decided to leave while he could.

"Coombe was kept aware of all that happened, and in the fluster of the doctor he saw the rest of the gang he had built up. For Cunn had been the contact man, and it was equally certain that once Cunn was out of England the K.K. Stocking men would not be safe. Certainly once he had disengaged with their funds and with the proceeds of the last jewel robbery, he would be a fool if he kept their identities secret. Coombe, he possibly never knew by name or by sight, for the inspector was only a voice on the telephone to him. The other four men, who were all great men—though specialists in their own line—would turn over to the police. With them in prison he would have been safe.

"But Inspector Coombe besetled him. Dallas had been keeping the story from the Laskard under observation all evening, and when it got dark he had crept aboard and hidden himself in the hatch that covered the engine.

"He was there when Coombe came aboard, and Coombe had decided that for his own safety Cunn had to die. Dallas knew then that all his suspicions were correct.

"It was no intention of mine to permit Coombe to shoot Cunn, but the murder was carried out so brutally and so offhandedly that Dallas had no time to act. By the time he could get to the inspector, Cunn was dead."

The Commissioner nodded. "The young lady has corroborated that. I am sure that no blame attaches to you, Captain Dallas."

And John Dallas smiled. "Thank you, sir."

Bill Wade laid down his pen. "The case is now closed," he said, and his eyes were twinkling, "although there may be complications yet."

A little flush spread over Dallas' cheeks. He rose to his feet and went to the door.

In the next room five Vine was listening to a partly argument of detectives, who were arguing her with his captives.

"There I was," said Sergeant Boik. "It's a wonder to me I've here to tell the tale! Oh, hello, captain!"

He rose and gave a military salute.

"I was just telling the young lady the sort of life I've had in the force. If she's any sense she'll make you check your job before she marries you. Excuse me!" And he went out very tactfully.

THE END.

Write to The Editor, The THRILLER Office, The Highbury House, Farringham Street, London, E.C.4, and let him have your opinion of this story. Meanwhile, save the page till you decide of next week's long suspense story.

# 6th "Music Hall" Contest NOW ON!

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For your list attempt see No. 1 column. A single tick, at least, only may be sent—in, if making extra attempts, use a separate column each time, putting 10 names only in each column sent.

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**Closing Day: THURSDAY, April 13th, 1939.** The money will be paid by return on Friday. April 14th and the result will be announced in our regular position later.

**Rules:** The First Prize of £50, the Second of £10, and the 20 names which will be £100 in value, are to be selected from the list of 26 "Tops" named, the other 26, determined by the total number of tickets submitted with your "Music-Hall" Programme. Every ticket must be enclosed in a separate envelope, addressed to the Editor, and the name of the "Top" selected must be written on the envelope and sent to the Editor by return of post. The envelope must be marked with the name of the "Top" selected, and the name of the "Top" selected must be written on the envelope. Every attempt to be on ONE in a separate column each time, and accompanied by stamps of 10, or by return of post for 10 stamps, or by air, change or postal order for 10 stamps. Post promptly to: "Music Hall" No. 1, G.P.O. Box 528, The Highbury House, Farringham Street, London, E.C.4.

It is a condition of entry that the name of the "Top" selected, and the name of the "Top" selected, must be written on the envelope, and the name of the "Top" selected, and the name of the "Top" selected, must be written on the envelope. Every attempt to be on ONE in a separate column each time, and accompanied by stamps of 10, or by return of post for 10 stamps, or by air, change or postal order for 10 stamps. Post promptly to: "Music Hall" No. 1, G.P.O. Box 528, The Highbury House, Farringham Street, London, E.C.4.

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WHO IS 'DAVY JONES'? WHAT IS THE SECRET OF HIS POWER?

# RIVER of DEATH

**OPENING CHAPTERS  
OF AN  
ENTHRALLING STORY  
OF THE SHADOW**

**By  
MAXWELL  
GRANT**



Chapter 1.  
MINTRELS OF DEATH.

THE Thames was a broad expanse of darkness. The hour was long past midnight. A haze of fog drifted low on the surface of the river. Nothing was visible except the hazy lights of Greenwich and the sinister gleams that twinkled on the other shore.

Through that protecting darkness a speedboat moved downstream.

The boat was painted jet-black. The men in the boat were black, too. There were four men. Burned cork had darkened their faces so that they looked like coloured minstrels. But there was nothing comic about the gleams of their watchful eyes.

These men were criminals. Their speedboat was a floating arsenal.

Their goal was a pier on the northern shore of the river, about a mile from Greenwich. Close by was the headquarters of the river police. But the things aboard the black speedboat were ready for water cops. Nor were they worried about rival crooks. A whispered name, passed furtively from lip to lip, would send small-ry pier pirates from the misty blackness of the Thames.

Davy Jones!

The speedboat veered suddenly. It began to glide across towards the sterns that lined the bank. Waves splashed in one another in the black craft. The name of Pike was mentioned.

Pike was the leader of these minstrels of Davy Jones. He sat crouched in the bow, directing the progress of the speedboat. From the clipped talk that passed between Pike and his men, it was evident that a raid was about to be made on one steamship named the Equator. The plans that had been cunningly made to cover up the theft of priceless loot, made the crooks chuckle.

They were repeating to-night what they had cleverly done on other occasions. The police had no knowledge of gigantic crime going on under their very noses. They had no suspicion of the existence of a super-criminal who called himself Davy Jones.

The diffuse shape of the Equator loomed suddenly ahead. It was in a wide water berth between two piers.

Everything favoured the black-faced pirates. The quay was piled high with crates and boxes, preventing any view of the river from the street beyond. The wharf next to the one where the Equator lay was dark and deserted. A strike had interrupted repairs to that wharf. A wreck barge lay alongside, with a jumble of timbers and machinery.

The pirates expected help from a crooked stevedore aboard the Equator. For were they disappointed. A rope ladder dangled snake-like above the water. But there was no sign of the peering head of the stevedore.

Suddenly, Pike cursed. He had drifted close enough to see the shape of a second boat! It was a blunt-nosed, dirty craft, moored directly below the dangling rope ladder. It was empty.

Pike recognized the boat instantly. It belonged to a river thief named Sator Marco, who earned a precarious living by stealing whatever his gang could lay hands on.

Pike's action was swift. He boarded Sator Marco's clumsy craft and scouted it. The blunt-nosed boat sank with a groovy gurgle. The speedboat took its place at the foot of the rope ladder. Not a sound had been made to alarm the thieves already aboard the liner.

Lowering one of his hatchmen below, Pike and the other two climbed the rope ladder noiselessly. They found the stevedore dead on the deck. A blow from a black-jack had crushed in his skull.

There was no sign of the river stevedore.

But the flared surface of the stevedore's deck showed what was going on. Cases of merchandise had been brought up from the hold. One of them had been broken open. The rest were still intact, waiting to be lowered over the side.

Pike and his two pals moved cautiously towards a companionway door which had been pried open. They knew there were six men in Sator Marco's gang. They wanted to trap them without the risk of failure.

But late intervened in the shape of a flashlight, that suddenly emerged from the companionway door. The beam focused on Pike's starting face. There was a yell of alarm, followed by the roar of a shot. More men tumbled into view on the deck.

Pike didn't reply to that shot. He was a shrewd killer. His two hatchmen were invisible in the dark shadow. Pike cried out, as if in terror, and began to retreat.

The thing with the flashlight had seen only one man. He anticipated an easy victory. With a yell, he raced forward. The rest of Marco's mob darted after him.

They ran into a deadly ambush. A hail of lead ripped from a Tommy gun. Men roared and fell.

Of Sator Marco's mob, four were killed instantly. A fifth had leapt ashore, wounded, but had escaped.

Sator Marco had fled. Pike took after him as he raced towards the bow of the liner. He had no fear of Equator's crew interfering with his vengeance. There was only a skeleton crew aboard in port, and the treacherous stevedore had locked them in the hold. Pike's pursuing fire made a rapid work on the deck.

Already the alarm had penetrated to the shore. The distant blast of a police whistle was audible.

Those henchmen of Pike wanted to get away.

Marco ran like a deer. He vaulted overboard on a ball of ballast struck towards the bow of his body, which struck the black water with a splash and vanished. Grim faces at the rail watched for him to reappear.

But Sator Marco didn't. Born and raised on the water front, he was an expert swimmer. He swam under water, hidden from sight of the killers high above. He passed the equal ball of the barge opposite the Equator and swam to the pier beyond it with the speed of a water rat, vanishing in safety.

Pike, venting an oath of fury, knew that he had doubly failed in what had been planned as a perfect crime. Two of Marco's gang had stolen the ball of ballast, including the cunning Marco. Pike's identity was no longer a secret, and through Pike, the unknown master criminal who called himself Davy Jones might be reached.

But Pike didn't lose his nerve for an instant—or forget the real purpose that had brought him to the Equator.

Disregarding the groaning stevedore ashore and on the river, he raced down into the hold of the liner. He was gone only

a couple of minutes. When he started he was parking, but there was trouble in his sliding eyes. A mysterious patch was slung around his neck.

The look-out in the black speedboat below was pulling a frightened warning.

"Harry it up! Let's go! The whole damned river is smoking!"

But Pike was still not finished. He leaped over the dead motions on the deck and pressed against their foreheads something which he had whipped from a pocket. It left a queer three-pronged mark on the pale skin of each corpse.

The mark was that of a trident. Every water-front crook in London would know what that meant. It was the brand of Davy Jones!

The bodies were flung overhead. The engine of the speedboat sputtered with a roar of power. It made for the open river.

As it did so, a blinding white searchlight played the blackness of the Thames. The alarm had reached the river police. The police boat was closing in as the motor-boat disappeared.

Police rifles began to crack. British troops the black lead with a grateful thrash! But the slugs merely fattened and dropped into the river. The boat was protected by armor. Two thugs at a shotted machine-gun in the stern waded with grim speed. Its air-cooled steel jaws thrashed through the air in the steel shield. Pop-pop-pop-pop!

That last burst of snoring had given the gammon their name. The flaming snort lifted. Lead whined accurately towards the glazing eye of the police searchlight.

The light went out. The policeman who had been operating it plunged on his face, his body riddled in a dozen places. Darkness dropped like a cloak on the river.

But the uniformed policeman of the police launch had gone! Crouched low to avoid the hail of lead, he began to close-up the gap that separated the two teams.

This was exactly what Pike wanted. He shifted an order to his third lieutenant—who had drifted towards the wooden lockers.

The crack raised the pipe-like spout of a machine-gun. He looked it with what looked like a metal can. Compressed air sent it hurrying towards the bullet-mashed windows of the police launch. It exploded inside with a gushing cloud of dense white vapor. Tear gas!

Out of that fog staggered the black-coat lieutenant, clanking at his armored eyes. The police boat swung wildly in an erratic half circle. Other cops sprang to take over the controls, but the dense fog of tear gas drove them back. But not for long. The breeze dispersed the tear-gas.

The sipped police boat was still doggedly pursuing the official killer in the employ of Davy Jones!

The fog of tear gas had cleared from the pilot-house. Another lieutenant had taken the helm. But the searchlight was still damaged. The click of tools was audible in the pauses between the crack of rifle fire.

Pike shrank. Without a searchlight, the cops had no chance. He cranked on every ounce of power his engine could deliver. Long before the awaiting police merchant's could make a temporary repair job on the shattered searchlight mechanism, the rear of the criminal speedboat had divided in a part. The part that in smoke above.

Suddenly, there was a shout of elation from the cops talking at the wrecked searchlight. A temporary rigging brought

renewed electric current. A new blast was hurled into position in front of the powerful reflector. The eye of the searchlight sent a dazzling white cone along the dark waters of the Thames.

It revealed nothing!

Cries of astonishment went up from the staring cops in the boat. The speedboat had been less than a half mile ahead when its pulsating roar had died. Yet the boat was gone! It had vanished as abruptly as if the remaining thug had opened the stern and driven the boat straight down-wards into the muddy bed of the river.

A perfect crime had been committed—except for the escape of Sailor Marco. Tomorrow would take care of that. Pike decided, with a grim tightening of his lip.

He checked as he unfastened a pocket from about his neck. There was river water above him, but he was not beneath the Thames, as the police might appear from the manner in which he had disappeared.

The police were destined to be helpless. But Pike failed to take another grim personal into consideration. The personality of a man whose life was devoted to the vying out of lesser criminals of the type whom Pike served.

The Shadow!

Would the Shadow be down into this amazing mystery? Pike was already moving swiftly to answer that question.

#### THE MAN ON THE FERRY.

TWO men were discussing the events on the Thames River the night before, which had filled every morning paper with sensational headlines. They were close friends. One man was Joe Carter, of the C.I.D., Scotland Yard. The other was Clyde Burke, reporter on the "Morning Sun."

"The whole thing smelt fishy to me," Clyde Burke said.

Carter drew a deep breath.

"And this business about Davy Jones! Who is he? What is he? My informers tell me that for weeks the underworld has been buzzing with quiet rumors that a supercriminal has taken over the entire river-side of London. They were afraid to talk before this morning. I wanted to see. Then this thing bursts in our faces, and every paper in London except the "Sun" is jelling at me to make an immediate arrest. You call that fishy?"

"I'm talking about the robbery last," Clyde said quietly.

He pointed out what he meant.

The boat involved in the crime aboard the Equator didn't make sense. A few smashed boxes of cheap merchandise might have attracted the cheap mobsters of Sailor Marco, but never those efficiently murderous henchmen of the unknown Davy Jones. Something more important was behind the Equator massacre.

"I work it out like this," Clyde said. "Sailor Marco and his men were after the cheap merchandise. Were the other men after it, too? I doubt it. Not with the high-powered boat and the complete arsenal they seemed to have. I think Sailor Marco's gang got in the way of these bigger shots."

"That's why they were branded on the forehead and drowned. The whole start was a challenge to the underworld as well as to the police. Don't you get the warning? Keep close of Davy Jones—leave the river front to him—or you'll end up in Davy Jones' lockers!"

It was Carter's turn to grin. He bent forward and chopped a quick command into the desk phone.

"Bring in Smoke Parelli!" he growled.

"Parelli?" Clyde said, startled.

"We found him hiding in the back room of a limousine dock, with a bullet through his shoulder. Nobody but you knows that he's under arrest. He admits he was aboard the Equator last night and got shot when he jumped ashore. Claims that he didn't recognize any of the other gang. But I've got an idea that Parelli has softened considerably. If he doesn't know anything, he can give us a line on Sailor Marco—who does know, or I'll cut my last!"

A moment later, Parelli was led in by two stalwart detectives. He slumped heavily into a chair and the detectives went out. Smoke's arm and shoulders were bandaged. His face was deathly pale, but his wound was not serious. The pale as his face came from terror.

"Listen, Smoke! You're on the spot! Speak, and I give you my word you'll go free as a prosecutor's witness after we nail those top killers. Or you can keep your trap shut, and I'll see that you swing for murder!"

"I didn't kill no cops! You can't prove I was in that black speedboat, I can prove I wasn't!"

Carter nodded.

"Sure you can, Smoke. But can you prove you didn't bump off Rat Murphy a little over three weeks ago? That's the murder rap I'm talking about. Think it over."

Parelli's face turned green. He knew that Sailor Marco had killed Rat Murphy. But he knew also that he was finger man for the M. His voice rose in a shrill squeal.

"I'll talk! The hell with Marco! Why should I take the rap for him? He arrested me and let me to take a bullet, damn him! I don't even know where he's hiding. But I can tell you how you can pick him up in half an hour!"

When Parelli was finally led away, cringing with fear, Clyde pointed to his notes on Carter's check his head. The facts were already neatly arranged in his methodical police mind.

They were startling facts.

Carter knew now that there had been four gamblers in the black speedboat. All four had been disguised with burnt cork. But Sailor Marco had recognized the leader before he escaped from the hail of gunfire. Marco was hiding in Woodwick; Parelli didn't know where. But he disclosed something far more important.

Marco had boasted that he knew who the lieutenant of Davy Jones was. He was coming to Greenwich in strange place for blackmail. He expected to pry big dough out of an unknown supercriminal by threatening to expose the identity of the lieutenant who had headed the raid on the Equator.

Carter spring to his feet. So did Clyde Burke.

"This is all on the sly," Joe snapped warningly. "If you come with me, you've got to promise that you won't spill a word in print until I give you permission."

"Right!" Clyde replied.

Plain-clothes men slipped into the room. They were given quick instructions. Two cars left police headquarters without any fuss.

Their goal was the Woodwick Ferry. The net was closing around Sailor Marco, but there were others on the same ground—Davy Jones, and unnamed by anybody else—the Shadow—the silent ruse-fighter in the country.

Don't make any mistake of this powerful shogun.

# OLD SI AND YOUNG JED



THE MINERS!

**O**LD SILAS VARLEY, the meanest man in the West, lived in a shack near Sawback. Around his homestead was a barbed-wire fence, and one wire was charged with electricity. That was because Old Si had a secret mine, and the gold was hidden under his floorboards.

Two others lived in that shack. One was HICKORY DOOD, the man of all work, plump, good-natured, with a weakness for romantic novels.

The other was young JED VARLEY, the mail who had been abandoned on Old Si's doorstep. He had grown up into a husky, likable youngster.

But another fellow turned up—MORTIMER SMOKES—who claimed to be Old Si's nephew. And then trouble started, for Smokey joined up with two of the local tough lads, PATCH RILEY and the BOY BANISTER, and began to work out ways and means of robbing Old Si. Jed, however, was too slick for them, so, to get rid of him, they framed him over a train hold-up, and he had to take to the hills, unharmed.

Smokey hired Patch Riley to kidnap Old Si. They took him to their hide-out in the hills, but Young Jed got together a mixed posse of young lads and went after them. They changed into Riley's camp and captured the trainists. Before he had time to shoot Old Si and kill him in dead.

But Old Si wasn't dead. A buckle on his trousers had saved him. Jed bound him, and it was arranged that the old man should take and Jed should announce his death to the sheriff.

When that was done the sheriff sealed up Old Si's cabin until the legal heir could be determined. But the old man, helped by Jed and his pals, built a raft and attempted to reach his mine by way of an undergrown river. Half-way to the cave they stuck fast in the tunnel.

"What is it?" demanded Grampop. "It didn't feel wed' his against anything hard."

Hickory grunted.

"I guess it's my stomach," he reported.

"It's jammed up against the roof of the tunnel. I can't get through."

But Grampop was equal to that.

"Well have to tow you," he decided. And so they did. They dropped poor old Hickory over the back of the raft, with instructions to swim against the current, and somehow they squeezed through. And then they felt the become growing stronger, and Jed smothered on his words to pierce the darkness. Grampop looked ahead with gleaming eyes.

"Darned if it ain't my cave. Jed like you said! I always figured on all that water wast be running away somewhere, but I never aimed to find out where it went."

They uncoiled, tying a rope round one of the stalagmites. Then, with Jed's torch, flaring ahead of them, they passed through the cave, but Jed switched off before they came to the cave mouth. The claim was supposed to be sealed up and deserted; it wouldn't do to show any mysterious lights. Somewhere beyond that stockade Hurry Shabo was peering up and down, waiting for intruders, and he didn't know the real owner of the claim was inside already!

"O.K., boys, get moving!" Grampop ordered.

They slipped into the cabin. They had only a trickle of starlight to work by, but Grampop knew his way around his own cabin blindfold. He threw aside the rug and hoisted out of the way the loose planks in the flooring. Then he dropped into the grave-like opening that was his cache.

Grampop had stowed his precious nuggets and gold-dust away in sacks, each one tied up and sealed, and Jed remembered how jealously the old man had guarded the stuff. But he seemed a changed man now. He slung up those sacks as carelessly as though they contained nothing more valuable than breakfast food, tossing them up to Hickory, to Whitey and to Jed.

"Get moving!" he ordered. "We got

A POWERFUL STORY OF  
THE MEANEST MAN IN  
THE WEST AND HIS HUSKY  
YOUNG PAL—BY ONE OF  
THE MOST POPULAR  
AUTHORS OF THE DAY

to leave the whole place cleared out by daylight an' everything fixed like it was before!"

They carried the gold through and arranged it carefully on the raft. Only when he was sure every last trace of it was gone did Grampop put the boards back and arrange the rug over the top of them and leave the cabin as before. Mort Smokey was in for a shock when he claimed his inheritance, but that wasn't the half of it. Grampop was fixing a heap more trouble for his loving nephew!

#### MORT SMOKEY TAKES POSSESSION.

**T**HERRY'D laid the gold out neatly on the raft, and now they berried the milk as silently as possible through the flooded tunnels towards the river. The current was with them now, they had to battle against being carried along too swiftly, and when they came to the part where the road was low, and they had to leave Hickory Doody abandoned, they almost lost him, and he was only saved when Jed grabbed hold of him by his shirt collar just as he was going under.

Only a few yards of low raft, however, and then they could land the dripping, shivering Hickory on board again. By the light of the flash-lamp Old Si regarded him grimly.

"It might have been worse," he said. "It might have been some of that fine gold that was in danger."

Hickory sneezed, and adopted a dignified air. Jed hid his smile in a snort, and helped Whitey Mason to fight against the raft being carried away by the swirling current. But, presently they were swept out on the wide bed of the river, under a starry sky, and the rocky-loaded raft was easier to manipulate. They paddled to the shallows and then started to pole the raft along the bank until they came in sight of the staked workings of the No Hope claim.

"O.K.," said Grampop. "The tow up."

They made fast the raft and started to unload. Grampop was fixing the chambers with his trowel and dust. He made them stow all the gold down the black mouth of the diggings, and for the first time in its brief life the No Hope mine was worth something. Grampop gave Whitey Mason an ugly-looking oil-shower and posted him as guard at the head of the shaft.

"Now," he said, "we can have some coffee."

Jed felt proud of the old boy, as tough as many a man forty years younger than himself. But still he couldn't understand

why gran'pop had surrendered his claim to the mine, and left Mortimer Stone and all of Sawback to assume his share.

"You got your heart all right, gran'pop," Jed protested. "But there's a heap of gold in that mountain pit at Mint Stone cove to dig for!"

Gran'pop smiled grimly.

"Stone's not dead, so after the sort of gold you have to dig for," he said. "Don't you go arguing with your wifes, my boy."

Jed relaxed into silence. Gran'pop seemed quite untroubled by the news of his death, and Jed concluded by his gran'pop had the case well in hand, so the best thing he could do was what he was told.

The next day gran'pop gave him some crisp orders.

"You head right back to Sawback and report to the sheriff that you can't lay hands on your birth certificate or nothing, so you reckon you'll have to admit that Mortimer Stone is your grandpop's only living relative."

"But they'll give Stone the claim!" Jed protested.

"Sure," gran'pop asserted. "They'll give Stone the claim. Then you being around and see how much good it does him!"

Morty Dudd looked anxious, and put in a word to gran'pop.

"Say, old 'un, you ain't figuring to be your own ghost and haunt that there claim? Because the guys around here, they got a habit of putting a bullet in anything they fancy might be a ghost, and inquiring afterwards if it's supernatural or not."

Gran'pop looked at him with scorn.

"Naw," he said. "I ain't figuring to be a ghost. Jed 'n' I'm figuring to be alive after

a lot of guys who think they are smart are dead."

Jed didn't argue because he didn't want to be smacked down, but later on he tracked into Sawback, miserable and alone. He headed for the sheriff's office, and Mortimer Stone must have seen him pass the saloon, because he came hurrying along a few moments later. A number of other guys took the hint and came along too, so the sheriff's office was pretty crowded, and those guys who couldn't get in poked their noses through the doorway. They had even opened the window from the street, and half a dozen faces had been thrust through that.

Not that the sheriff minded. Egh Mackay loved a crowd when he was transacting official business. Now he tilted back his chair, put his feet against his desk, and thrust his thumbs in his breeches so that everyone could see his sheriff's star. He looked amiable at Jed's woe-stricken figure.

"Well, my boy," he said, "have you done what I told you? Have you brought along proof as old St. Varley was your gran'pop?"

"Everyone knows he was my gran'pop," Jed said solemnly. "I was living with Old St. Long before Mort Stone here poked his long nose into Sawback."

There was a murmur of agreement from the men round the door. Most of them knew that Jed had been in Sawback ever since he was a tiny kid, there'd never been any doubt that he was the old man's grandson. As for Mortimer Stone, he was an outsider and a newcomer. He had a smiling and friendly way with him, but that didn't impress everybody.

A big ranch hand voiced what they were all feeling.

"Say, sheriff," he grunted. "Everyone knows as young Jed was old St.'s gran'pop. There ain't never no occasion to bury him for a neither. But now the old fox has kicked the bucket, you can't let this gran'pop get away with the old man's claim and leave this kid with nothing!"

There was a matter of legislation, and Jed felt his heart warm. They were good guys, these old-timers of Sawback, and it wasn't their fault they'd got a rotten sheriff who couldn't have kept law and order in a chicken run. Now Egh Mackay played around with pale and blinking eyes.

"I ain't here to concern myself with right and wrong," he said. "I'm here to administer the law. The law says someone's got to prove as he's the legal next-of-kin, and Mr. Stone here, he's brought me proof as he's the old man's nephew. The boy's got the chance to prove as he's the grandson, and if he proves it, I'll see he gets his cut. What do you say, sorry? You got your birth certificate?"

Jed hung his head and answered nothing. "I ain't got no papers nor nothing," he said. "But I aint returned old St. was my gran'pop, the way he used to take his belt and leather on."

"That ain't legal proof," Egh Mackay said scornfully. "He might have done that out of kindness. If you can't prove who you are you ain't got no legal standing, and the law says I've got to admit a man's word over the entire message, till old man droll."

There was a silence. Egh could always start the boys with his little bit of Latin, it was the depth and width of his learning that had got Egh Mackay made sheriff, not because of any shooting ability. Now it seemed that Jed hadn't got a leg to stand on, and Mortimer Stone stepped forward, a gleam of triumph in his eyes.

"You mean, sheriff," he demanded, "that the old man's any standing, and therefore everything comes to me, as the only proved relative? And as Silas Varley died intestate, that means I get his claim and his shack, and his wages and his mine, and everything?"

"That's about it, Mr. Stone," Egh Mackay agreed amiably.

Mortimer Stone beamed.

"I got to hand it to you, sheriff," he said. "A guy certainly couldn't get a better brand of justice if he went to the Supreme Court. I'll thank you, sheriff, to hand me the keys to my uncle's claim an' compound, and come up and break them official seals. And I'll be highly honored if you'll give a bottle of whiskey with me at the same time."

He turned round and spoke to the crowd round the door.

"Any of you boys are welcome, if you want to drink to my good fortune."

There was an ugly murmur, and Mort Stone realized that he wasn't very popular, and didn't say any more. But Egh Mackay's eyes were shining at the prospect of free whiskey. He got his hands and he took out to the sealed claim with Mortimer Stone, and there the sheriff dismissed his guard and broke the official seals.

"Here's the key, Mr. Stone," he said.

Mort Stone unlocked the door to the compound. He looked round the claim with a feeling of triumph. It was his, all his, and old Silas Varley was, as he believed, resting somewhere out there on the hills. Now his claim belonged to Mort Stone, and the secret mine in the mountain, and the hidden hoard of gold that old man Varley had been adding to all these years.

"Come and have a drink, sheriff," he said proudly.

They made for Silas Varley's cabin, and a shinking yellow glare followed them. This was Ming Lo, an infuriating little Chinaman. Ming had come out to Sawback with the intention of starting a Chinese laundry, but no one had wanted him that Westerners wash their shirts themselves, and then only every six months or so. So Ming had lost his savings and couldn't even raise the fare to get out of Sawback. He'd been mighty pleased to grab the job as Mortimer Stone's servant.

"Whiskey, Ming," ordered Stone. "And make it strong."

Ming hastened to obey. Stone and the sheriff raised their glasses and clinked them together.

"Here's to Sawback," said Mort Stone. "It's a swell little town."

"I hope you stay around here, Mr. Stone," Egh said respectfully. "I guess you'd mighty soon become one of our most respected citizens."

Stone nodded. You be thought, a clever guy like him could be a pretty big man in a dopey town like Sawback. Now he was a man of wealth he might do worse than settle down.

Wealth! The very thought of it made his eyes glimmer. He was thinking of the yellow gold hidden away under the very floor they were standing on. What would this fat fool of a sheriff think if he knew he was standing on a fortune? But he didn't know where St. Varley had hidden his gold, any more than anyone else knew, and they didn't know the extent of the hoard.

Mort got rid of the sheriff, and then he looked thoughtfully at the little yellow man. There wasn't much danger of Ming Lo spying, all Ming worried about was where his next bowl of rice was coming

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from, but Mort Stone didn't believe in taking risks.

"Take no risks, Ming," he ordered. "Go out of camp."

Ming smiled at him blandly.

"O Klay, boss," he asserted.

He shuffled out, and Mort Stone put his whisky glass down. A fortune under his feet, and he didn't even have to dig for it! All he had to do was to sleep and help himself! But before he had even turned back the man he was disturbed by the sound of a heavy tread outside. Stone turned sharply, saw the cabin door open. He saw a big man with a iron-clad hat on the back of his red head step inside and her at him with his one good eye. Patch Riley, with the black patch over his empty eye-socket, looking more evil than ever.

Patch lifted against the door, and he smiled. And, if it was possible, his face looked even more evil when he wore a friendly smile. But he meant well, and Mort Stone's breath came back as he realized that Patch Riley didn't mean trouble.

"Heavily, pal?" said Riley.

"Heavily, Patch!" Mort Stone cried heartily. "It certainly is swell to see a pal again! Step right in and take a drink. See, you don't object to drinking out of a glass after the sheriff?"

"No!" said Patch. "As long as it was liquor I'd drink out of his boot!"

He took a drink and settled down. Mort Stone realized that he was unostentatious, and it would pay him to keep him so. Presently Patch Riley asked him a question.

"Well," he said, "we cracked the old guy, and now you got his chain. You found the dough yet?"

Mort Stone looked unhappy.

"Patch, my old buddy, I ain't found a red cent's worth of gold yet! I'll be damn foolish if it turns out that the old guy didn't have a lot of gold hid away after all! But I ain't giving up. I'm going to hunt for that bastard with my own strike fire! I'm gonna dig up every yard of this claim, and I'll eat my way through that darn mountain. If there's any gold here, I'll find it!"

"Are you give me my cut," said Patch Riley.

"Sure, I'll give you your cut!" said Stone. "You've been a swell guy, and I ain't going to forget it. Say, Patch, you don't think I'm a double-crossing kind? Because a notion like that, it brags, Patch, I got some decency!"

Patch was impressed.

"Say you have, Mort," he said. "I ain't doubting you. I just dropped in friendly like. I know when you and the old man's bonded I'll get my cut. I'll be heading along, Mort. It ain't heading round these parts for me now. I got the sheriff scared stiff, but there's some regular guys started asking questions about me lately."

They gripped hands, and Patch Riley drifted away. He had tethered his horse out there in the growing dark, and Stone heard him grunt as he mounted. Stone's lip was curled in an ugly sneer. Riley might be tough, but he was a big dog, and had been fooled good and proper tonight. And after tonight, Stone decided, there wouldn't be any Patch Riley in any case.

Stone stepped back in the cabin and scribbled a hurried note to the sheriff.

"Dear Eph—You get a chance to make a name for yourself to-night with all these guys who have been here at you because you didn't go out, and get Patch Riley. Riley's just been down here alone, without his gun, and if you take a walk-

## NEXT WEEK

# JUST ANOTHER MURDER

Powerful long complete story by

## KENNEDY SCOTLAND

come up the mountain trail you'll get him easy. Better to take no chances but to put a stake in him from behind when you come up with him.—Your pal,

—Mort Stone."

Stone grinned an evil grin. That would it Patch Riley; and it would please the sheriff, too. Stone walked across the dark compound and kicked at the door of the smaller hut. The yellow face of Ming Lo showed at the crack.

"Here!" Stone ordered. "Take this note down to the sheriff, pronto!"

"Plonso!" agreed Ming eagerly.

### RILEY'S RUSE.

Stone saw him shuffle off, and turned back to his own cabin. There'd be shooting in the hills to-night, but he wouldn't be in it. Riley would fight if he knew he was followed, but they'd get his money or love, and that would be one more trouble for Mortimer Stone. It was better to arrange for a few bullets in a parlor, or he might have slipped into a snare.

Stone stepped and turned back the lid on the floor of the cabin. He stamped, and the cabin floor gave back a hollow sound. Stone swung a few of the loose boards around, revealing a gaping crevice of blackness. The old man's hoarse, hoarse cough had been the produce of years of work! Stone jumped down inside, tossed some more boards out of the way.

And then someone kicked in the door of the cabin and stepped briskly inside, someone with a gun in his right hand, a long gun with a fat, blood barrel, with an evil eye glinting coldly behind it.

Patch Riley, no longer smiling and friendly, but with his single eye darting a look of hate, his lower lip trembling and pugnacious, his menacing glare crooked around his trigger. It gave plenty for Mortimer Stone's nerve that he didn't crack right away.

"I found it, Patch!" he gasped. "I just found it!"

But Patch Riley wasn't to be fooled any more. He came closer, and Mortimer Stone felt his heart beat to water in his breast. He could have screamed out like a girl, but his tongue hung in fear in the roof of his mouth.

"Sure you found it," said Patch Riley slowly. "Sure, square-shooting, smooth-tongued Mortimer Stone found what he was looking for! And I found something, too. I found that yellow eye heading for the town, and I hit him a crack over the head and took the little note for the sheriff from him! I got it here, you double-crossing yellow rat, you!"

His gun lowered, steepled. Stone thought his last moment had come. His face was grey and bloodless, he was trembling all over, there was sweat on the palms of his hands. That even jet he tried to talk himself out of it.

"Say, listen, Patch! I can—"

Riley grinned. Suddenly his left hand

shot out; he seized Stone by the hair of his head, and he hoisted him clean out of that hole in the floor and flung him walling against the wall of the cabin, so violently that the breath was knocked out of him. Riley stepped across after him, jolted his gun into his middle, thrust it in hard. He put up his left hand again and, with the level of it, he fastened Stone's nose against his face, pressed it against his cheek bones to burning point. Stone couldn't cry out, because Riley's hand was choking him.

He was almost fainting from pain as Riley stepped back.

"Patch, old boss," he whispered feebly. Riley hit him, deep in the stomach, point-blank, so that his fat neck went down. Stone's eyes turned upwards; he slumped in the ground, his back still against the wall. Instinctively and automatically Patch Riley kicked him, but never enough to get into consciousness. Stone's lower lip was bleeding, his tongue swollen, but he was still trying to smother a plea for mercy. His seared eyes fixed imploringly on Riley.

"Do you know what I'm gonna do?" Patch Riley asked him. "I'm gonna cut your ears off and make you eat 'em!"

"No, Patch, no!" whispered Stone hoarsely.

Suddenly Riley stiffened, his one hairy eye shifted. He had heard something, and Stone had heard it, too. The sound of hoofs, the clink of a bridle. Huge stone suddenly from Mortimer Stone's frightened eyes.

"That damn Chink!" growled Riley. "He's brought out a posse! I should have cuted him proper!"

He turned to Stone, now the hope in his eyes, and his own face was ugly again.

"But you ain't gonna get away," he said. "Now, I ain't gonna lose my square-shooting, overhanded buddy. You're coming right along, Mortimer!"

Stone gasped, tried to slide sideways. Riley packed him up, flung him over his shoulder like a sack of flour. When Stone

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struggled he back-headed him brutally under the jaw. Stone snuggled across his shoulder helplessly, and Riley bolted out of the cabin.

The own horse wasn't bothered. It didn't need to be. Riley along the half-connections there across his saddle horn, vaulted up behind him. The horse reared off without word or sign, gathered pace as Riley groped for the reins. They made for the dark gate of the paddock, turned for the hills. But those following lights were close now, and Riley saw a torch stab the darkness. He heard a hoarse shout.

"There he goes!"  
Riley swore, found his gun and turned in the saddle. He swung three shots behind him wildly, and they got his gun up. He might need those other three shots when he'd got a better target. He sounded Mort Stone, bent low over him, urged his horse to greater speed.

Behind him the heads of hounds drummed. The posse were saving their fire, that meant they were poring their torches into him, they were waiting down for an all-out bay, and all they had if it need be, Riley swore. He was taking a lot from the laughter of his horsefolk in the West-to sleep over-again. If he followed Mort Stone he'd have a better chance. But a wilder sort of justice stared in Patch Riley. He was going to hang on to Stone.

Riley glanced round, saw shadowy shapes against the night sky, riding determinedly. But they were as far off as ever, and he knew the tracks among these hills as no other man knew them. Besides, when he reached the heart of the hills he could count on help. When he got his gun, raised him it would take a mighty courageous posse to shoot it out with them.

It he got the break.  
And then Patch Riley got evidence that he wasn't going to get the breaks for ever.

His horse went lame.  
It was a good horse, with the heart of a lion, and ready to keep going until its gallant heart burst for Patch Riley. But Riley felt it jerk as the best part of his foot in a jack-rabbit hole in the darkness, although it recovered almost at once. And then, suddenly the horse slowed down mysteriously, halting along on three feet. And Riley knew the leg was gone.

"Damn your miserable knee!" he growled.

He flung himself sideways off the horse, and it sprang and galloped off madly on its three good legs. Let it starve or rot, it was no money use to Patch Riley. He felt crawling to the legs, but he had dragged Mortimer Stone with him. He lay gasping at the foot of a fat rock that reared twelve feet over his head, and he could hear the pursuing circles closing in. Riley flung some curses in their direction.

"But they ain't got Patch Riley yet!" he growled.

He swore with amazing witfulness. He jerked Mortimer Stone to his feet, by the

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throat, snatched his back against the rock so that he would protrude upright. Riley twitched his own black patch off his head, revealing his horrible red eye-socket beneath. He fixed the black patch over Stone's right eye, he crammed his own ten-gallon hat on top of Stone's head. Stone, three-quarters dead, stood three wearily, propped up by the rock behind him.

"My pal!" said Riley severely.  
He stopped aside. The riders were very near now. Riley took cover behind the rock against which Stone was propped. He had drawn his gun, he loaded it at those shadowy figures. They had moved in nearby, taking counsel.

"Better come quiet, Riley," someone called. "We got you covered!"

Riley's gun spit red flame. A horse squealed and reared, a man swore. The same voice that had spoken before called out.

"You asked for it, Mr. Riley. Now you've got it!"

The beam of a torch stabbed through the darkness, snatched, came to rest on the still figure propped against the rock. The torch showed up the big hat of Patch Riley, the patch over the right eye. It didn't show up the battered, stumped features of Mortimer Stone. No one in the posse knew that Patch Riley had not ridden alone, they only knew that Riley was a human rattlesnake and you couldn't take chances with him.

Six guns spoke at once, red flame flashed from the gun barrels, the electric burning echoed from the high hills. The chest of that man standing upright must have been battered in by the fusillade of shots; they were through him and hit, tried against the rock behind. He sagged at the knees, pitched forward on his face. There was a silence. Then the point of

torch disappearing. The torch cut through darkness again. The men came forward uneasily. But the figure with the patch over his eye lay still.

It was Eph Mackay who stirred him with his foot and jerked him dead. There was a sudden return of confidence to his bearing.

"Well, boys," he said, "Am I a tough sheriff or am I not? Did I promise you that I'd get Patch Riley if you'd be patient? And ain't I got him?"

There was a murmur of dissent. Mackay snarled answered him scornfully.

"You been scared stiff all right, and now you want to claim all the credit," he said. "You wouldn't have ridden out after him with the posse if we hadn't told you that word rope you up and make you ride!"

Eph Mackay piped.  
"No ill feeling, boys!" he quavered. "No ill feeling! After all, the important thing is we got Patch Riley. Take him up, some of you, and we'll take him right back to Swaback, Patch ten-gallon hat, and everything, and we'll let the guys see the way we handle outlaws."

No one moved closer, at Mortimer Stone's snarl and battered face. The patch on his eye was sufficient identification. Someone poked him up, tossed him across a saddle bag. The man who carried turned round, stared soberly for Mackay. No one looked round. True, there was Patch Riley's gang to deal with yet, but what was Patch Riley's gang without Patch?

No one saw a talking figure, on foot, slip from the shelter of the big rock and run stealthily into the darkness.

(Riley's voice the evening witness to every man's constabulary of this stirring story.)

# MilkyWay 1<sup>st</sup>

—made by MARS—

## Everybody's BAR-gain

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